FAITH AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964

Translated and edited by
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Introduction

Political science was founded by Plato in the midst of the crisis of Hellenic society. A breakdown of consensus regarding the ordering principles of the political world and recurring intellectual and social dissension occasioned by the extreme polarities of dogmatism and skepticism provided Plato with direct experience of political and spiritual instability. Characteristically the fundamental problems of political order become issues of widespread concern during times of instability. Disorder cannot be ignored. During quiet times, political science is apt to contract into a descriptive enterprise, perhaps into a justification for the principles that animate venerable institutions and traditional practices. On the other hand, periods of revolutionary turmoil and political upheaval, what Toynbee called the "time[s] of troubles," usually coincide with the expansion of political science to a comprehensive account of human society and history and of the fundamental principles of order. Again and again in the history of mankind, profound analyses have emerged from grave political crises.

To use conventional language, these analyses constitute the canon of political philosophy. Whether one confines one's focus to Western phenomena or expands it to consider the great political thinkers of India and China, one finds an association of political crises with the formulation of principles of political science. Moreover, this empirical generalization is theoretically intelligible insofar as the actual experience of political disorder elicits from spiritually sensitive thinkers a response that aims to restore an awareness of the principles of political, social, and individual order initially in the mind of the individual

thinker and then, perhaps, in the minds and actions of others. The legacy of these efforts is contained in canonical texts that testify to the search for order and that permit subsequent readers to recollect or reconstitute the experiential and reflective origins of this process of consciousness.

There are no guarantees of success. The quest for an awareness of principles can lead down any number of false trails. One may search, for instance, for a precision that is to be found only in mathematics. One may value language crystallized as doctrine as the account of truth rather than see language symbols as indices of movement within a meditative process. On the other hand, antinomian temptations may lead a thinker to renounce common sense altogether. There are, in short, a myriad of ways to diminish the full amplitude of experience. One thing, however, seems clear, at least so far as the evidence allows us to judge; it is that all the great thinkers have begun their quest by reflecting on the concrete situation of their own troubled times. Often an intense experience of tyranny, injustice, or evil leads people to reflect first on its concrete meaning for them and then to begin the search for principles of order undergirding existing turmoil. Moreover, the turbulence, tensions, and ambiguities visible in immediate and concrete events usually reflect a complexity that must be entered into the equation when the order of reality is symbolized by the philosophic consciousness. The concrete, one may say, has a stabilizing effect on that symbolization.

The lives and work of both Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin conform to the pattern just sketched. Both men developed comprehensive accounts of contemporary political disorders and did so, moreover, on the basis of similar concrete experiences, namely the National Socialist revolution, which made of them both refugees in America. One factor that unites their thought is that neither avoided the effort to come to grips with the complexities inherent in the concrete situation. Both attempted to retrieve the kind of direct encounter with political things that characterized the political science of Plato and Aristotle.

Since the deaths of Strauss (1973) and of Voegelin (1985), a considerable amount of scholarly publication has been devoted to the explication of their work. Moreover, posthumous publication of scattered essays and hitherto unpublished material has provided scholars with fresh material for exegesis, analysis, and, of course, with occasions to express their critical opinions of the two men and of other or rival interpreters of their work. This doxographic material is of considerable interest in itself, not least of all because it illustrates to contemporary scholars the age-old problem of succession. The generation of the founders has now been succeeded by rival camps of diadochi as well as by

their common barbaric enemies, mesmerized by doctrinal sectarianism and the joy of polemic. Much of this polemical material, no doubt, would have benefited from a close study of the correspondence presented here, an exchange that displays little of the doctrinal rigidity nowadays so much in the ascendant. What is significant about the present collection, however, is not simply that it provides a historical window on the early development of the Straussian and Voegelinian "positions" regarding the several topics and problems that the two men discussed. Rather, the Strauss-Voegelin correspondence illustrates how two philosophers (or political scientists in the large and Aristotelian sense) were able to carry on an intense discussion over a period of many years, committed not to victory over one another but to the cooperative exegesis of political reality. Both Strauss and Voegelin agreed that clarity regarding the most important and most fundamental questions was more important than agreement regarding any answers to those questions. These letters illuminate at least part of the process of critical clarification.

Agreement as regards the purpose of political science—namely, clarification of the fundamental issues—served, without paradox or contradiction, as the basis upon which Strauss and Voegelin could disagree with each other. Moreover, because their disagreements in detail as well as their agreement in principle aimed at clarifying the structure of political reality, the exchange of views was initially insightful for both the authors and remains so for us. Their agreement in detail, on the question of so-called behavioralism or on the significance of the celebrated intellectual Sir Karl Popper, will come as no surprise, because both Strauss and Voegelin were serious thinkers for whom disregard of the fundamental questions was an abnegation of philosophical responsibility. The epistolary medium is clearly advantageous to later readers because it enables both men to express their views on the current degenerate state of social science with a demotic frankness that necessarily would have been expunged from scholarly publication.

The exchange in Letters 3 and 4 is a fine example of their common effort to attain clarity concerning the relevant issues. There they discussed some of the problems that arose during the course of Voegelin's critical review of *The Theory of Legal Science*, written by Huntington Cairns. Strauss began by observing that Cairns's position, which Voegelin had criticized, "is not worth discussing." It was characterized by Strauss as "the last remnant of the science established by Plato and Aristotle." Strauss then described the Platonic-Aristotelian science and added that Voegelin's criticism of Cairns's position was based not upon a recovery of original Platonic-Aristotelian science but upon Christianity. Here Strauss and Voegelin were in agreement regarding the

scientific or intellectual value of Cairns's work, but they apparently had different reasons for their adverse judgments.

According to Strauss, Cairns's legal science was a defective remnant of Platonic-Aristotelian science. Cairns's legal science did not explicitly reject Platonic-Aristotelian science, though it did explicitly reject Christianity, which Strauss saw as the basis of Voegelin's criticism. For Strauss, then, the superficiality of Cairns's legal science was accounted for by the relationship between Platonic-Aristotelian science and this degenerate remnant. The criticism raised by Voegelin in light of Christianity accordingly lay outside this question. Hence Strauss observed to Voegelin: "Now, you will say . . . that the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of science was put to rest through Christianity and the discovery of history. I am not quite persuaded of that." For Strauss, then, it was sufficient to look at the critique by modern science of Platonic-Aristotelian science; when Strauss undertook to do so, the question remained open as to superiority of one over the other.

Strauss closed his letter by raising a related issue. He could not agree with Voegelin when the latter had spoken of Plato's attempt to create a myth of the Socratic soul: Plato's "effort was directed toward grounding science anew and especially the science of the soul and of the state." By implication the effort of Plato was independent of mythopoesis. Strauss's far-ranging argument may be summarized as follows: (1) there is such a thing as Platonic-Aristotelian science; (2) Huntington Cairns's book *The Theory of Legal Science* is an example of degenerate Platonic-Aristotelian science; (3) Voegelin's criticism is grounded less on that original science than on Christianity; (4) Plato did not ground his science on myth.

Voegelin's response addressed these topics directly. The starting point for him was not Platonic-Aristotelian science but "the Platonic-Aristotelian problem," at the center of which lay, at least for Plato, a complex of fundamental experiences focused on the personality and death of Socrates. Plato's soul, Voegelin said, was ordered in consequence of his real, immediate, concrete encounter with Socrates; this experience enabled him both to make sense of the surrounding disorder and to resist it, at least in his own soul. The evidence for such an assertion lay in the theoretical achievement of political science, on the one hand, and in Plato's communication of the meaning of his encounter with the well-ordered Socratic soul, on the other. According to Voegelin, Plato conveyed the basic, or fundamental, experiences of his encounter with Socrates by means of the discursive, linguistic form of the myth.

In addition, however, Plato employed the discursive form of science. Moreover, he used this form of discourse to discuss both "person-peripheral"

topics (so called by Max Scheler) and substantive matters of human order. Subsequently in Western history this ambiguous usage led to the great confusion identified here by Voegelin as "scientism." In light of the confusions in the modern day occasioned by an overly rigid conception of what is to be counted as science, one might say that the difficulty was simply that Plato did not differentiate between the two kinds of scientific discourse; the central point Voegelin wished to make, therefore, was that Platonic political science was scientific because the Platonic myth of the order of the Socratic soul established the fundament criteria by which evidence regarding political reality was judged to be relevant for scientific discussion. In that sense alone, according to Voegelin, Plato grounded his science in myth. In contrast, Strauss preferred to speak of the discursive "argument" and the dramatic "action" of a Platonic dialogue. The important point of agreement is that, for neither of them, was Plato simply the author of an argument.

Voegelin followed these remarks with an account of Aristotle's political science and its foundation. According to Voegelin, not the myth or "drama" of the Socratic soul but the theoretical life of the intellectual mystic was the experiential center of Aristotelian political science. However, that political science was possible only because of Plato's achievement, which Aristotle took as given. Accordingly, Aristotle accepted the criteria of relevance achieved by the Platonic myth and, in Voegelin's term, "conceptualized" it.

Finally, Voegelin turned to the matter of Christianity and its relationship to Platonic-Aristotelian science. He disagreed with Strauss's interpretation of his own position, that Platonic-Aristotelian science was put to rest or put to an end or superseded by Christianity and the discovery of history. Rather, Voegelin said, Christianity and history changed the significance of the myth of the Socratic soul in one decisive respect: the Platonic-Aristotelian account of human being was that of a polis-being, but also of a being tied to the divine cosmos by way of the Delphic *omphalos*. Accordingly, there was no direct or immediate communication between the individual person and God. And correlatively, according to Voegelin, the Platonic-Aristotelian science of man was particularly Hellenic and not, therefore, universal. Christianity and history had expanded the relevant criteria of the Platonic-Aristotelian achievement.

It is clear from this summary of two letters that Strauss and Voegelin were not in agreement about the importance of such fundamental issues as the basis and character of Platonic-Aristotelian science and the relationship between that science and Christianity. Strauss's response, in Letter 5, illustrated well the point made earlier regarding their common concern for clarification of the fundamental issues. Strauss denied emphatically Voegelin's point that the

political science of Plato and Aristotle was by intention particularistically Hellenic; accordingly, by his account, Christianity was not required to universalize the insights of Plato and Aristotle. Nonetheless, while he said flatly that he did not consider Voegelin's interpretation to be correct, he wrote that it was "toweringly superior" to nearly everything else available. This was not merely a polite compliment.

To use conventional and somewhat opaque language, the topic of "reason and revelation" remained implicit in much of their subsequent correspondence, most of which antedated the publication of the mature work of both men. Readers will notice that the longest and most philosophically sustained letters were written prior to and during the time they delivered their lectures at the University of Chicago as part of the series sponsored by the Charles R. Walgreen Foundation for the Study of American Institutions. Strauss gave his first series of lectures in 1949; the published results were *Natural Right and History* (1953). Voegelin's lectures of 1951 led to *The New Science of Politics* (1952), and Strauss's second series, in 1953, found its way into print as *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). Moreover, in 1956 Voegelin published the first volume of his five-volume magnum opus, *Order and History* (1956-1987).

This present collection of letters does not presume to be an introduction to the work of Voegelin and Strauss. That task has been undertaken with considerable success already by others. In addition, of course, there has been considerable controversy, especially as regards the internal divisions and political influence of the so-called Straussian school. That, however, is also a separate topic.

At the risk of imposing too rigid a scheme, one may say that the chief topics of the correspondence were focused on the themes indicated in the title to this volume. The question of political philosophy, for example, was raised in Voegelin's review of Cairns's *Theory of Legal Science*. Cairns's book dealt with what might be called ordinary constitutional and liberal-democratic politics. The inadequacy of his treatment illustrated several current and still-unresolved problems with modern social science. Voegelin's review of Strauss's edition of *On Tyranny*, which was, incidentally, the only public review either man made of the other's work, illustrated those same problems in the more strenuous context of constitutional breakdown and tyranny. Both reviews were published during the most intense period of their correspondence.

The pieces in Part 2 deal explicitly with the question of "reason and revelation," or of faith and political philosophy. However, unlike the material included in Voegelin's review and Strauss's response, and unlike the topics covered for the most part in the correspondence, these essays were all written from the perspectives and arguments developed by both men in their maturity. Readers

will, therefore be able to trace the late and more fully considered remarks of Strauss and Voegelin on these matters back to earlier formulations developed during the course of their epistolary conversation.

A number of issues emerge in such a comparison that are of assistance in understanding the nature of the agreement and disagreement between Strauss and Voegelin. The most immediate of these concerns the American intellectual environment in which they found themselves after fleeing National Socialism. It was a peculiar amalgam of pragmatism and common sense, but also of positivism, phenomenalism, historicism, and behavioralism, the last named of which were bound together in great part by the desire to emulate the achievement of natural science. What concerned both thinkers about these intellectual movements was the absence of philosophical substance at their core. This hollowness was most evident in the inability of contemporary social science to analyze critically the manifest disorder of European political life during the 1930s.

Strauss devoted much of his writing to explaining how the manifold crises of the day were symptomatic of a more fundamental intellectual and spiritual crisis. The social sciences, he stated, are unable to justify the claim that their inquiries constitute a rational enterprise concerned with the truth. Indeed, the social sciences now avoid the question of analyzing or validating the rationality or justice of political purposes. The reason for this state of affairs is that the dominant interpretive instruments of the social sciences,. positivism and historicism, do not recognize the distinctiveness of the political realm and consider undiscernible the grounds that once made an assessment of politics possible. Politics, for modern social science, has no higher dignity than other social pursuits; political philosophy has accordingly been degraded into merely another ideology. Positivism elevates scientific knowledge, based on the model of natural science, to the status of genuine knowledge, thus invalidating judgments that do not display the universality, certainty, and precision of mathematical forms. Historicism deprives principles of understanding and action of any ground other than "groundless decision" or "fateful dispensation." In its most radical, but at the same time inevitable, form, historicism demands total revaluation of all values and continual new beginnings. Heidegger's radical historicism, for instance, demands a wholesale repudiation of all previous types of human interaction and human thought, including the traditional forms of political work and action, and presumes, by standing at an "absolute moment" of insight into the structure of all history, to open up to a wholly new, but unspecifiable, existence. This "eschatological prospect," Strauss pointed out, obviously spurns the naturally restraining and limiting features of politics

and political philosophy alike.[1] The danger of such immoderation is best understood, Strauss suggests, by examining Nietzsche's predictive comments on this century's wars, on planetary rule, and on other cataclysmic transformations. If the constructs of reality dominating current intellectual circles continue to prevail, according to Strauss, most men and women will find it increasingly difficult simply to lead safe and decent lives.

Many of Strauss's assertions concerning the simplemindedness of the dominant models in the social sciences and the dangerous implications of that simplicity emerge in his analyses of classic texts. In Plato's and Aristotle's artful creations, positions are often presented only to show how politically volatile abbreviated accounts of reality can be. The arguments of Polymarchus, Adeimantus, Polus, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Hippodamus, Phaedrus, or even Socrates himself, in these texts, are fragments abstracted from that whole toward which a comprehensive philosophy aspires. Neglecting man's synthetic nature or the essential conflict between politics and philosophy as a consequence of that nature, or failing to root inquiry in the elementary truths of prescientific understanding, or failing to balance awe with practicality, or demanding of human things an exactitude that the subject matter cannot bear—these acts are first and foremost intellectual errors. But in this century the expectations they advance have also come to nourish ideological activism and mass political movements, which are spiritual perversions as well as intellectual mistakes. Abstracting from the whole leads not only to a lowered capacity for thought but also to "hyper-perfectionist" expectations along with cowardly cynicism regarding the possibility of political action. A survey of the major fields and streams within the social sciences reveals a pattern of persistent and repeated abstraction from the essential features of human existence. Only the restoration of a comprehensive political philosophy, Strauss contended, could reintegrate the fragments of human life, currently appropriated under separate and independent social science disciplines, into an adequate account of human existence.

Voegelin, too, questioned the reigning orthodoxy in terms of how it determined the criteria of theoretical relevance. Three factors in particular, he said, dominated social science orthodoxy. One was the scientism that proceeded on the assumption that all human phenomena could at least in principle be studied in terms of physics; the second was the centrality of epistemology in intellectual inquiry; the third was the predominant focus on

1. "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 2:1 (1971): 5-7.

methodology. What all three produce, Voegelin suggested, is a transfiguration of the way that reality is known by humans and a debarring of crucial components of that reality from consideration. First, by stipulating that what can be scientifically known, that is, known to be true, about human existence is confined to what can manifest itself in the mathematical form of the laws of physics, the social scientist eventually annuls the singularity of man in relation to the rest of nature. Presuming that no decisive difference distinguishes human existence from other organic or vegetative nature condemns the study of humans to assessment of behavioral regularities emanating from their biological structure. It denies that human being is "the spiritually creative center of society and history."[2] It denies as well that human beings are responsible for the diverse understandings of order that they in fact entertain. Second, by assuming that philosophic inquiry can be exhausted by accounts of how and under what conditions the knowing subject apprehends the knowable object, one neglects the comprehensive context within which the subject seeks to know—namely, his consciousness of participation in a reality that transcends his own cognitive talents. Participatory consciousness, Voegelin argues, if it is to be an expression of true responsiveness to reality in its entirety, will of necessity have to acknowledge that cognition is one part of the human response to the world-transcendent ground of being. Finally, the subordination of theoretical relevance to method makes it difficult, if not impossible, to recognize that there are different realms of being that require different methods to be analyzed adequately. The choice of appropriate method depends on its usefulness to the purpose of the inquiry, not the other way round. The inversion of method and purpose simply means that, even though the different disciplines of the social sciences are linked together by an identical "scientific" method, no frame of reference based on a comprehensive purpose composes those disciplines into a unity of meaning. Each discipline could assert its meaningfulness, but such an assertion does not establish meaning. Moreover, making the use of method the sole criterion of science would deny that the "elementary verities" of prescientific understanding had any bearing on the nature or purpose of the method used to come to a theoretical understanding of those verities. The result, Voegelin stated, could only

2. Voegelin, "The Theory of Legal Science," *Louisiana Law Review* 4 (1942): 564. Reprinted in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 27, *The Nature of Law and Related Legal Writings* ed. Robert Anthony Pascal, James Lee Babin, and John William Corrington (1991. Available, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), chap. 6.

be the loss of the meaning of science as "a truthful account of the structure of reality," because significant elements of reality would simply be ignored.[3]

By narrowing the scope and losing the substantive purpose of social scientific inquiry, the result is a closure of the psyche and a loss of the responsiveness to reality to which science aspires. And this denial and imaginative reinvention of reality, Voegelin said, is the intellectual condition that contributes to the construction of political ideologies and finally helps to inspire mass political action. An examination of the "race idea," of propaganda, of the destruction of language, and of the construction of political religions and civil theologies shows, Voegelin demonstrated in his early work, how phenomena can be imaginatively distorted with the intention of re-creating the substance of existence. Later he would direct his attention to the imaginary transfiguration of world-transcendent symbols into world-immanent social projects. Despite the imaginary or "magical" aspect of these actions, they are nevertheless capable of mobilizing support for revolutionary transformations of human existence by promises of "the war to end all wars," "the liberation of mankind," or "the cessation of injustice." These dreams of a pragmatic and historical actualization of perfection and purity proceed by a conception of an intramundane personality for whom the ontological ambiguities implied by the combination of the symbols body/soul, perfection/imperfection, finite/infinite, life/death have been condensed into psychological or social, which is to say, manipulable, variables that can be adjusted into harmony with one another by the application of sufficient force. What these "ideas" have in common is their negligible link to a frame of reference drawn from the common experience of primary reality. They share the assumption that human existence is simpler than the integrated compound of body and soul, than the ambiguities and pragmatic compromises of the historical situation, than the tensions of our spiritual existence in a meditative movement toward the reality of the divine ground of being. They have "reality" only because they have been situated within a "system" and have had social effects by virtue of political mobilization and agitation. But in fact they constitute a "second reality" because the ontological ambiguities of human existence are not elements of a system. The "ideas" of perfection and purity contract reality, denying the ambiguities to which common sense and ordinary language still pay tribute. Such "contraction" of exis-

3. *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 5. Reprinted in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

tence, Voegelin said, is not so much a scientific error or a mistake as it is a manifestation of spiritual disorder and a resistance to reality. And the restrictions of consciousness played themselves out in practice in the restrictive deformations of human existence that sustained the political ideologies and mass political movements of this century.

Strauss and Voegelin agree, then, that the political deformations of the twentieth century were anticipated by intellectual constructs of reality that depart from reality and restrict the horizon of human existence. In turn, these intellectual movements are preparation for political action. Such imaginary constructs arise from an incapacity to determine what is relevant or irrelevant to political science. "Abstracting" or "contracting" reality has provided effective but imaginary "ideas" for the murderous wars of ideology that may be waged in the name of science, progress, and a new humanism. The events of the twentieth century demonstrated how deadly this seemingly "intellectual" error could be, how the dreamworld of intellectuals could translate into the horrors of political domination. Both Strauss and Voegelin realized that exposing the distortions of reality underlying these phenomena would require a restoration of the whole human being as the focus of political science, a renewal of a philosophy that again considered man's essential being, or human nature. For both men, this resumption of philosophical anthropology would take its bearings from classical philosophy, from the clarity Plato and Aristotle brought, as Strauss says, to "what the fundamental questions are and how they should be approached."

Both thinkers shared the conviction that the internal unraveling of modern philosophy had made possible a renewal of the experience of thinking and a direct encounter with reality, unmediated by centuries of preoccupation with formular manifestations of a genuine philosophic quest. But what was meant by renewing the philosophic enterprise on "the Platonic-Aristotelian level of questioning"? What shape would that renewal have?

Voegelin argues that the search for political order is found in human responsiveness to the order of being. Making sense of that order means symbolizing in intelligible language the experience of prearticulate participation in it. But the experience of participation is always "a disturbing in-between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death," in short, of irredeemable ambiguity. The process of reality in which human being participates contains a historical dimension, the most obvious aspect of which is experienced as unrest, disquiet, or "tension." What gives symbols their particular persuasive power is their proximity to this tension of and within reality. However,

the intimacy of symbol and the experience of tension are easily disturbed, especially when the symbol is abstracted from the originating experience and turned into a linguistic constituent of doctrine. Transforming symbols into doctrines turns condensations of participation in a diffuse field of reality into instruments of cognition. Reality, Voegelin writes, is not external to consciousness and so not an object of cognition. It is a process within which humans are situated and that is illuminated from within.

Voegelin considers dogmatism, which colors every dimension of what he and Strauss both call the crisis of modernity, to be a greater problem than lack of finality. The philosophizing consciousness cannot stand outside the process of reality, beyond the experience of existential tension, and discern its meaning as a whole. This means that "truth" is not a possession but a dimension of "existence in tension." The symbolization of this "tensional truth" or "existential truth" is how the mystery of reality is made meaningful. "Existential truth" is not therefore a representation of reality in an image of achievement, completeness, and perfection. But neither should the term *existential* evoke the sense of a merely transient meaning somehow situationally grasped within endless and unbounded temporality. With either version the symbols cease to express reality, and reason ceases to illuminate the context within which personal existence is situated.

But Strauss was not content with this formulation; he objected, for example, to Voegelin's use of the word *existential*. Behind such usage, in his view, lay Heidegger's separation of thinking and metaphysics, as well as his attachment to Being, understood now as the indeterminate, generative process of emergence and withdrawal. The Heideggerian "existentialist" longing for a primordial "belongingness" to Being, which antedates subjectivism and objectivism, does not, Strauss says, contribute to the human need for moral and political principles. "Existential," Strauss argues, "is opposed to the 'objective', 'theoretical', and thus betrays [an] anti-Platonic origin . . . insofar as I am serious and there are questions, I look for the objective truth." And such "objectivity" necessarily excludes the "infinitely unimportant" historical. "'History,'" Strauss says, "belongs in the practical dimension, in the dimension which is subordinated to the theoretical." Is this a difference over linguistic formulas or is it a difference in principle?

It is true that Voegelin does resist the demand for "objectivity," at least as it is commonly used, because he sees in the enterprise to achieve it a contraction and reduction of the range of relevant elements constituting the philosophizing consciousness. "The idea of man," he argued, "is not a datum in the external world but a creation of the human spirit, undergoing historical changes,

and it has to be recreated every generation and by every single person." Moreover, again in contrast to Strauss, he is unwilling to make the strong statement that the aim of a recollective history of philosophy is truth, preferring to confine the task to the more modest aim of accounting for "existential transformations" in which "truth" becomes socially effective or is hindered in such effectiveness. For Voegelin this implies no negation or relativization of the structure of reality, as should be clear from his list of "existential" themes: "theogony . . . destruction of the knowledge of truth through the *pleonexia* of intellectuals . . . the effectiveness of authority through existential readiness to reproduce the known truth imaginatively." It is not clear, however, that this response would satisfy Strauss's objection.

Voegelin, it seems, restricts himself to symbolizing the process of the noetic experience of transcendent divine being, which by its very character cannot be definitive or complete. The decisive issue here is Voegelin's reliance on what by convention would be called a metaphysics of process: process, while it evidently has structure and substance, cannot be objectively fixed. Nor could a comprehensive depiction of the process of consciousness occlude the "historical dimension," which Voegelin denies is a mere stream of temporal events distinguishable from what is real; the "historical dimension," for Voegelin, is "the permanent presence of the process of reality in which man participates with his conscious existence."[4] It is thus more than the merely contingent "practical"; it is certainly other than Heidegger's parousiastic speculation on Being.[5]

In opposition to what he sees as an implicit or perhaps nascent "historicism," Strauss raises the specter of a regression into the indeterminacy of a fateful encounter with the boundless and limitless. What Strauss sees as being lost by such an encounter are the standards by which political regimes and psyches can be measured, understood, and judged. Neither defective regimes nor the ascent of the soul toward perfection and completeness could be assessed without the possibility of a fulfillment to the philosophic enterprise. The term *existential*, for Strauss, cancels the possibility of "theory," that is, the possibility of a reality transcendent to existence, an essential order that is both prescriptive and capable of apprehension. For Strauss, the issues of context and effectiveness of known truth are matters that do not essentially condition the possibil-

4. "Remembrance of Things Past" (1977), in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, *Published Essays, 1966-1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (1990. Available, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 311.

5. See Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, trans. William J. Fitzpatrick, in *Collected Works* 5:275-77; see also *Collected Works* 12:8-10.

ity of truth; instead, they are related to remediable flaws of the discussants in a philosophic conversation. The decisive philosophic issue for Strauss, and one that is denied in the term *existential*, is the possibility of transcendence of the merely "practical."

Obviously, Voegelin too aims at the renewal of the possibility of transcendence as the formative component of the substance of a sound society. And, from his point of view, as he writes to Strauss, "we are in agreement . . . on the question of ontology." Moreover, there is on Voegelin's part neither lack of aptitude for political judgment nor any abandonment of the measures of political order in the exercise of that judgment. Wherein, then, lie their differences?

Voegelin warns of twin dangers accompanying dogmatic adherence to doctrines. First, the objective representation of experience as doctrine threatens to sever the connection of experience with reality, which leads to "belief" in a remnant of ideas that are lifeless, not to say meaningless. Second, such doctrines lend themselves to the purpose of ideological agitation, by means of terms such as *progress*, *the liberation of mankind*, and so forth. The complex of experiences constituting the openness of consciousness to divine reality cannot be rendered into univocal and precise terms. Abbreviating the full amplitude of that complex fundamentally distorts the experiences, leaving the symbols available as practical political instruments for mobilizing emotions and sentiments and thereby human beings as well.

But Strauss hardly ignores the erotic dynamic or drama of philosophy, as is evident in his denunciation of Kierkegaard's concept of "existence" because it denied "the passion of revelation that moves the Platonic dialogue, this highest *mania*." Nor is it appropriate to see Strauss's concern for measure as the inspiration for ideological activism. Indeed, he accuses "existentialist philosophy" of transforming praxis into "existence," that is, of analyzing away the distinct compromises and ambivalences peculiar to political prudence and to political life. In place of prudence and political life, existentialists recognize only a generalized sphere of sheer happenings that must be responded to either authentically or inauthentically by a systematic project, "a praxis," he comments, "that is no longer intelligible as praxis." Disagreements over the use of the term *existence*, it seems, point to a divergence about the nature of the philosophizing psyche.

To clarify this divergence, difference, or even disagreement, perhaps one should turn to Plato, whose account of the self-moved psyche and of its appropriate motion may offer an explanation. Plato sees the psyche's self-movement as arising from its being situated in a "tensional" field structured by forces tending on the one hand toward limit, proportionality, and unity and on the other hand

toward transience, flux, and dispersion. These forces apparently emanate from two polar determinations, the unmoved One and the boundless infinite, or *apeiron*. The interplay of these forces constitutes the essence of the psyche as being-in-motion, but it also informs that motion. When the two forces are in balance, the tension, and hence free self-movement, of the psyche is preserved. Thought will display a rhythm that unites measure and dynamism. But when one pole is abstracted and the field of experience is no longer structured by tension, the psyche no longer moves itself and thus loses its distinctive capacity for thought. It will incline toward sophistry when exercising its ratiocinative power, and toward a love for tyranny when it becomes a political force. Depending on the dominant pull within the psyches of his interlocutors, Plato's Socrates is portrayed in one dialogue or another as being dramatically opposed to dogmatism or to radical skepticism, often abstracting from the complete experience of the philosophic quest to exaggerate the temptations and dangers of lack of balance. Books 8 and 9 of the *Republic*, for example, are an extensive dramatic catalog of the pathology into which the psyche can be derailed.

In light of Plato's account of the nature of thought and of his concern for its pathological manifestations, one could suggest that the divergence of focus between Strauss and Voegelin should not be seen as an indication that their "positions" are opposed. Rather, these "positions" are warnings to others of the danger of destroying the balance of the psyche's self-motion. Each "position" is a resistance to untruth. In a way, each thinker stands in the relation of Plato to Socrates in the *Apology*, advancing a subtle charge concerning the implications of a degeneration of the teaching in the hands of lesser minds unable to maintain balance in the experience of thinking.

The reason for the divergence may be traced to the distinct problems that each man emphasized in focusing attention on the formative moment of thought that prevents derailment. Voegelin finds in the language of process an adequate account of how consciousness attempts from its finite experiences to understand the "infinite" processes in which it participates. "Truth" is not a representation of a reality external to consciousness but rather an illumination from within, structured by the philosophizing consciousness experiencing reality as transcending itself. "Process," "unrest," and "tension" evoke the experiences of the questioning being. Strauss, on the other hand, is concerned with the measures that necessarily structure and inform that process of ascent; the Platonic-Aristotelian questioning, for Strauss, is a progressive disclosure of truth, the replacement of the randomness and fickleness of opinion by a complete account of the whole that is implied from the beginning of longing. But neither thinker denies they are necessarily complementary moments of the

event of philosophizing. The combination of Strauss's and Voegelin's analyses of the formative event that structures the thinking process brings out the comprehensive experience that Plato describes as the essence of the psyche. Together their accounts may be understood as adequate to the whole of that process, as expressing the healthy tension and balance between motion and measure, genesis and order, process and form. The apparent disagreement in terminology and details, then, can be seen as a difference in focus rather than of substance. Each identifies the vulnerability of the thinking process to corruption slightly differently. This leads each to emphasize one pole over the other as a means to restore balance. It would be inappropriate to build upon this difference in emphasis an interpretation of doctrinal divergence. Indeed, doctrinalization of thinking is precisely what each attempted to prevent. And this is, for us, the chief legacy that this correspondence leaves behind.

We would like to conclude this introduction with a few technical editorial observations. The correspondence of Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin is held chiefly in the Voegelin collection at the Hoover Institution, Stanford. A few letters exist only in the Strauss collection at the University of Chicago. Approximately fifty letters survive from a thirty-year period, 1934-1964, most of them written in German, and many of these, especially those by Strauss, written by hand.

The handwriting of both men was notoriously difficult to decipher. Strauss handwrote nearly all his letters; Voegelin typed most of his, adding only small changes by hand. Both men wrote in the midst of heavy teaching and scholarly commitments and often apologized for unavoidable delays. At one point Strauss observed that he had had proper paper some weeks earlier, but no time to write. Now that he had time, the only paper was of very poor quality. Three months went by and proper writing paper had yet to be found, so his message was again sent off on occasional scrap. Matters were made more difficult owing to Strauss's use of a personal shorthand. The first letter of a word might be clear, the next few not so clear, and the ending little more than a wiggled line.

The procedure we followed was first to transcribe the autograph into typescript and then to translate the typed rendering. Several German speakers of an older generation whom we thought might be more familiar than ourselves with the script Strauss employed were consulted. Voegelin, however, had no such expert assistance, with the result that he occasionally misread Strauss fundamentally. Indeed, there exist a few sentences in which all of the words could reasonably be rendered two or three different ways. This simply means that one cannot expect precision in a work of this type.

The heart of the correspondence, as we mentioned, was written between 1942 and 1953. During these years the two men became more familiar with one another's work, and the strict formality of the old world epistolary style was slightly relaxed from the highly formal *Sehr geherter Herr Doktor Voegelin/Strauss* to *Lieber Herr Strauss/Voegelin*. It never evolved into Lieber Freund or Dear Eric and Dear Leo. In short, Strauss and Voegelin retained a consistent respect for one another and an air of gravity throughout their conversation.

The first edition of this collection, published by Pennsylvania State University Press in 1993, contained a third section, which included several essays by scholars dealing with one or another aspect of the work of Strauss and Voegelin or with comparisons of their work. Partly for reasons of space and partly because the past decade of scholarly work would require significant revision of these papers to make them as useful today as they were then, we have omitted them from this edition.

Finally, we would like to repeat the warning issued earlier: newcomers to political philosophy should by no means consider the texts collected here in any way a substitute for the longer and harder arguments published in more polished versions elsewhere. It remains true, however, that the Strauss-Voegelin correspondence is remarkable for being directed toward the enduring topics of political philosophy. One can see in these exchanges how two scholars of great intelligence and good will were able to converse. Both men were aware of differences in their approaches to political reality and in their interpretations of texts. Both men agreed profoundly on the sources of political fanaticism and speculative fantasy even while expressing their arguments in distinctive language. To give but one last example: Strauss later wrote of the forgetting, or the oblivion, of eternity as characterizing the modern crisis, whereas Voegelin later described it in terms of the effort to bring about an imaginary collapse in the tension between man and God. Not a great deal of interpretative ingenuity is required to apprehend the existence of a family resemblance between these two formulations. In reading these letters and the major published work of these two great political philosophers one is given a splendid opportunity to undertake a meditative exegesis along the lines of meaning that so clearly underlie the exchanges presented here.

Acknowledgments

As we noted in the original edition, many individuals gave of their time to correct our decipherment of Strauss's handwriting, to offer suggestions regarding our translations, and to track down sources. Of these, we are particularly indebted to Daniela Kopp, Elke Schmidt, Jennifer Strauss-Clay, Thomas Pangle, and Thomas Heilke, whose combined labors contributed considerably to the text. Professors Dante Germino, Jürgen Gebhardt, Ernest Fortin, Brendan Purcell, Ken Dorter, Zdravko Planinc, Richard Palmer, and Hans-Georg Gadamer also saved us from many errors. In addition, we are grateful to Carleton University, to the Earhart Foundation, and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada for providing funds to support our research in the Voegelin archives at Hoover Institution, Stanford. Finally, we are grateful to the estates of Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin for permission to publish this correspondence.

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Letter 1

London, 2.X. 1934
18 Taviton St., W.C. 1
Museum 7914

Esteemed Mr. Strauss,

Mr. Kitteredge of the Rockefeller Foundation was kind enough to give me your address, as he thought that we would have some points of contact in our scientific work.[1] I am currently occupied with some studies on Renaissance philosophy and theories of the state. I will remain in London only for a few days and I would be very grateful if you could phone me as soon as possible, sometime in the morning before nine o'clock, so that we can make an appointment, if your time allows.

With the best wishes, I am,

Very respectfully yours,
Eric Voegelin

1. Both Strauss and Voegelin were at various times supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. Tracy Kitteredge was Assistant Director for the Social Sciences.

Letter 2

Social Research
An International Quarterly of
Political & Social Science
66 West 12 Street
New York City
January 19, 1942

Dr. Eric Voegelin
University of Alabama
Department of Political Science
University, Alabama

Dear Dr. Voegelin:

Thank you for your letter of January 14. I regret not having been able to see you while you were in New York.

We should be very grateful if you could find it possible to give us some definite information as to when we might expect your manuscript on the theory of the political myth, and also a more precise title, which we might list on our agenda.

Sincerely yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 3

3900 Greystone Avenue
New York City
24.11.1942

Esteemed Dr. Voegelin,

Many thanks for sending me your critique of Cairns's book;[2] I read the critique immediately with great interest and considerable agreement. One so rarely reads such detailed, thorough, and precise critiques. The flourish

2. Voegelin, "The Theory of Legal Science: A Review," *Louisiana Law Review* 4 (1942): 554–71; under review was Huntington Cairns, *The Theory of Legal Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

and the clarity of your diction make reading a pleasure. If there was some need for external confirmation of the appropriateness of your critique, then it is the response to it [by Cairns].[3]

There remains though, for me, a question that is not resolved by the refutation of Cairns (or of Weber either). After all, the position you attack is only the last remnant of the science established by Plato and Aristotle: the postulate of an exact ethics and politics in Plato; Aristotle's adhering to the ideal of exactness despite the abandonment of its application to the human things; the necessarily higher ranking of physics over ethics and politics, at least for Aristotle and his successors; the opinion that held for the whole tradition until the nineteenth century, "that the question of *generality* does have a bearing on the legitimacy of [the] status [of a science]" (contrary to p. 561);[4] the impossibility of grounding science on religious faith. People like Cairns (perhaps without knowing it) arrived from the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of science—indeed, not at their position, which is not worth discussing—but at the rejection of, for example, your position. Now, you will say (p. 563) that the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of science was put to rest through Christianity and the discovery of history.[5] I am not quite persuaded of that. Based on countercriticism of the Cartesian tradition, and leaving other questions aside, we can no longer adopt the thesis of Descartes and all his successors that Plato and Aristotle are fundamentally inadequate; we would have to verify this thesis more directly, by a direct critique of Plato and Aristotle. A critique requires adequate understanding. What about us? The more I read the classics, the more I see how inadequate the assistance is that one has been offered, for example, from classical philology. In short—I consider the central question

3. Huntington Cairns, "Comment," *Louisiana Law Review* 4 (1942): 571–72.

4. P. 561, top, "Is there not a distinction between generality of *intention* and generality of *factual* understanding?" [Footnote by Strauss.] Voegelin wrote, "A proposition may be illegitimate in a system of social science for one of two reasons: (1) because it is unverifiable, or (2) because it is irrelevant in the system of reference that is determined by philosophical anthropology; the question of generality has no bearing on the legitimacy of its status."

5. Voegelin wrote (562–63), "The appearance of Christ has added to the idea of man the dimension of spiritual singularity of every human being, so that we can no longer build a science of social order, for instance on the anthropologies of Plato or Aristotle. Likewise, within the Christian Western World the idea of man is not static, but changes constantly; it has acquired, for instance, through and since the Renaissance the dimension of historic singularity."

[of Plato and Aristotle versus Descartes] entirely open. I can especially not agree with you when you speak of Plato's attempt "to create a new myth": his effort was directed toward grounding science anew and especially the science of the soul and of the state.

But these are, in the context of the critique of Cairns, small matters. I have often asked myself how one could, for example, push the view held by Cairns in an intelligible manner *ad absurdum*; I find that you have resolved this problem excellently.

Please excuse me that I use the opportunity of these lines to remind you of a half-promised essay for *Social Research.* You would oblige me greatly if you could let me know when we might have it and what the exact title will be.

By rumor, I have heard that Dr. Benno Strauss (no relative of mine), an expert in German literature, particularly of the eighteenth century, and a very nice man, is at Louisiana University. Perhaps you will meet him at some point. In case you meet him, please greet him warmly from me.

Respectfully yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 4

December 9, 1942

Dear Dr. Strauss,

Warmest thanks for your dear letter of November 24. It is a true joy to receive an answer to a modest review that enters into the substantial problems, even though they can only be incidentally addressed.

Unfortunately, I must agree with your critical comments: Mr. Cairns's critique of positivism dissolves none of the problems of the counterposition. I believe, to be sure, to have seen a bit of light in these questions, thanks to work done on the *History of Political Ideas*,[6] which for myself at least has the function of clarifying the theoretically essential problems. If

6. *The History of Political Ideas* was a multivolume work written during the 1940s but not published at that time. It was recast several times. Part of it appeared as the first three volumes of *Order and History*; a fragment of the later materials was edited by John Hallowell as *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975).

you allow, I will briefly indicate where I see, if not solutions, at least possibilities of clarification; you will certainly be able to supplement further my necessarily fragmentary lines.

The Platonic-Aristotelian problem seems to me as well to be the inevitable starting-point. I see it in the following way: at the center of Platonic *political* thinking stand the *fundamental experiences*, which are tied together with the person and death of Socrates—catharsis through consciousness of death and the enthusiasm of eros both pave the way for the right ordering of the soul (*Dike*). The *theoretical* political-ethical achievement seems secondary to these fundamental experiences. Only when the fundamental order of the soul is defined, can the field of social relations determined by it be systematically ordered. In this sense, I understand the theoretical-scientific achievement of Plato as founded in myth (which he conveys as the representation of the fundamental experiences in the *Phaedo, Symposium,* the *Republic* and the *Laws*). The problem is thereby complicated in that Plato orients his idea of science to the nonmythical, person-peripheral sphere of logic, mathematics, and dialectic. The problem of scientism in the science of man as spiritual being appears to me to have its roots in the fact that the idea of science that is ordered by the model of person-peripheral areas is transferred to the subject fields that have to substantiate their scientific meaning in the mythical order of the soul (in the case of Plato it has less to do with a transfer than with a neglect of differentiation; out of this problem then arises the difficulty that the "idea" of a triangle can also be of a biological genus or of the Good). The "scientific" treatment of political and ethical problems seems to me to be possible since and because of Plato, because a myth of man (Socrates-Plato) has become the stable point for the choice of the relevant materials. The myth of man is, by the way, not a constant in Plato; in my chapters on the *Republic* and the *Laws*, I worked through in detail the change in the image of man from the first to the second dialogue.

The Aristotelian science of politics seems to be somewhat differently founded than the Platonic one. The Aristotelian center is no longer the Socratic myth, but rather the *bios theōrētikos* of the intellectual mystic. Through this, the great transformations become possible, from the "idea" of the state (which is directly founded in the myth) to the "ideal," which becomes the measure of empirical generalizations; from the forms of the soul of states in the *Republic* to the scientific types of regimes. Only from the Aristotelian position is the completely scientific-theoretical treatment of the political possible; but it is possible because the Platonic form, grown

from the myth, can now be assumed as datum and thus without the existential participation [of the philosopher] in the myth. The Aristotelian conception of an empirical-technical science of politics, which can give proposals for improving a given situation (the central part of the *Politics* on revolutions, their origins, and their prevention), is possible on the basis of adopting, albeit manifoldly changed, a soul-image of the [Platonic] states of the ideas. I see the specific meaning of Aristotle in that as an unmythical, intellectual mystic, he is able to operate easily with the system of relevance achieved by the myth and could subsume masses of empirical material under the now conceptualized mythical image.

I would not say, then, that the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of science (insofar as it has to do with the field of the political) was put to an end through Christianity and the discovery of history, but rather that the very possibilities of the Platonic-Aristotelian science already have their roots in myths and that Christianity and historical consciousness only changed them. They did not repeal them completely but only partially; but all the same, they did so in the not unimportant point, namely, that the Hellenocentric man has been replaced by the individual, the person in direct communication with God. The Platonic-Aristotelian man is the man of the polis and is, even for Aristotle, tied to the *omphalos* of Delphi; precisely from the Hellenic position, a universal political science is radically impossible. Christianity and historical consciousness seem rather to be steps in the direction of the universalization of the image of man, than steps that lead away from it. In my opinion that is the decisive reason for the superiority of the Christian anthropology over the Hellenic (obviously the Christian anthropology has its prehistory: in Cynic and Stoic Hellenism on the one hand, in the Israelite tradition since Deutero-Isaiah on the other). The belief in the universality of the Hellenic image of man seems to be a product of the Renaissance—a classicist's misunderstanding that is possible only in the atmosphere of the universality of man achieved by Christianity.

I will leave it at that. The form of a letter hardly allows one to enter into the particulars of theoretical problems.

Your admonition with regard to a manuscript finds me in the still unhappy situation that I am not finished with the *History*. I can hardly interrupt the work to write an article, but it would please me greatly if a publication of a chapter in *Social Research* were possible. Obviously such a chapter would show traces of the larger context from which it is taken. I am

enclosing a relatively independent piece for you to look at.[7] If you do not think it to be suitable, send it back to me without hesitation—I completely understand your editorial problems. If you believe it can be used, I would be glad to take on the revisions, which are probably necessary for an independent publication. In that case I would very much count on your suggestions.

I have not been able to find Dr. Benno Strauss to date; he is not indicated in the directory and none of my colleagues has heard of his name; are you sure that he is at LSU and not perhaps at one of the Junior Colleges that are scattered around the state?

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 5

3900 Greystone Ave.
New York City
20.12.1942

Dear Dr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your interesting letter of the ninth of this month.

Your essay (or chapter) is at this moment circulating among the members of our editorial board. The decision will be made at the end of January. Generally, *Social Research* does not print chapters out of books. Therefore, I cannot express to you any hope. Perhaps there will be a compromise, agreeable to both sides.

What you wrote about Plato and Aristotle naturally interested me quite directly. The broad outlines of the interpretation you advance were already known to me; but you have drawn out these outlines with unusual emphasis. I do not hold this interpretation to be correct. But it is so toweringly superior to nearly all that one gets to read about Plato and Aristotle, that I would greatly welcome its being presented to the American public.

One correction seems to me, in any case, indispensable. Assuming that

7. The chapter, "The People of God," was taken from the *History*. See below, Letter 7.

the Platonic-Aristotelian politics were really by their intention Greek, and not universalizable (which I decisively deny), even so, under no circumstances would the universalization of the Greek *politike epistēmē* have been first executed in the Renaissance: the reception of the same by the Muslims and the Christians (from the ninth century on) stands and falls with that generalization. Over this there cannot be a shadow of doubt.

As for the question of Plato's intention, this can only be decided on the basis of a radical, relentless interpretation of *every* Platonic dialogue on its own terms, or, whenever possible, of any Platonic dialogue on its own terms. For this reason, a discussion by letter is in fact impossible.

Perhaps we will see each other sometime.

With best wishes from us to you,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 6

3900 Greystone Ave.,
New York, N.Y.
13.2.43

My dear Dr. Voegelin,

Please excuse that I have not responded to your earlier letter of 28.12.42.[8] But it was impossible, even with the best will in the world.

Unfortunately, the fate of your essay has still not been decided. The session in which it will be decided takes place at the end of the month. I have discussed your essay with various members of the editorial board. Overall enthusiasm prevails regarding this very interesting, stimulating, indeed fascinating work. The objections are solely of a technical nature: there is a dislike, which has transformed itself into a rule, for printing chapters out of books; and twenty-five typed pages is the maximum. Whether these objections can be overcome I cannot say before matters are put to the test in the next editorial session. Would you be prepared to write an approximately twenty-five-page-long essay on "the sectarian mentality in politics"? Perhaps an understanding could be reached on this basis.

8. Letter lost or reference to Letter 4, 9 December 1942.

I share the enthusiasm about your essay. Above all, I completely agree that the radical doubt about the dogmas of the last three or four centuries is the beginning of every pursuit of wisdom. The frankness with which you address this preliminary question is praiseworthy in the highest degree. Only I am not certain if you proceed far enough: in your review of Cairns you said, against Cairns's thesis that we do not have a political science (or social science). We do have it, for example: in Max Weber's frame of thought. Can you really exempt Max Weber's sociology or, for that matter, any of today's existing (and not only desirable) research from the bracketing of modern thinking, which you claim? You will say that, after all, in modern times there was always a movement of opposition against modern thinking. But is not this movement of opposition always concentrated on itself, even when in opposition to modern thinking? Husserl is the only one who really sought a new beginning, *integre et ab integro*; the essay on the crisis in modern science is the clearest signpost—and it points to the beginning, or to the social sciences.

I read your essay on the Mongols with great interest and learned a great deal from it.[9] Many thanks. Do you know my article "Persecution and the Art of Writing" (*Social Research*, 1941)? In case it is not known or accessible to you, please let me know. Hula was telling me that you are interested in Arabic political philosophy.[10] That was once my speciality. In case you are interested, I am sending you a list of my publications in this area.[11]

I would very much like to see the table of contents of your *History*. In case I see something, or do not see something, that can be added in, I will obviously be glad to mention it to you.

With best wishes from us to you,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

9. Voegelin, "The Mongol Orders of Submission to the European Powers, 1245–1255," *Byzantion* 15 (1941): 378–413.

10. Eric Hula, New School for Social Research, editor of *Social Research*.

11. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maimonide et de Farabi," *Revue des etudes juives* 100 (1936): 1–37; "Eine vermißte Schrift Farabis," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80 (1936): 96–106; "Der Ort der Vorsehungslehre nach der Ansicht Maimunis," ibid. 81 (1937): 93–105.

Letter 7

February 20, 1943

Dear Dr. Strauss,

For today let me respond only regarding the manuscript—the rest of the contents of your letter must wait for next time.

It pleased me greatly to hear that you and the other members of the editorial board find favor with the work; I myself was a bit doubtful, as I see what I wrote against the background of a fantastic mass of material and I am not sufficiently distanced to be certain that an intelligible image emerges at all.

It would be a shame if you had to decline the manuscript for the technical reasons you mentioned, because unfortunately I cannot write an independent article at the moment. Nevertheless, I did look at the manuscript and I believe one could simply leave out the last section ("Methods of Conviction"); whoever doesn't know that it was there won't miss it. That reduces the manuscript by a fifth. I would be quite in agreement with this reduction. With regard to the number of manuscript pages, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the copy in your hands was typed by my secretary on a large-type typewriter with a generous distribution of space. My own manuscript, written on the machine with which I type this letter, has without the last section only twenty-five pages, with it, thirty-one. About your rule, not to print any chapters from books, I have naturally nothing to say; that is solely your editorial concern. I can only plead that the book is nowhere near publication and that the chapter in question deals with such a self-contained subject that it could really easily stand alone.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

The People of God

1. The Problem
   a. The Two Planes of Western Civilization
   b. The Category of Reformation
   c. Difficulties of Approach
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2. Institution and Movement
   a. The Institutionalization of Church and Empire
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   c. The Paulician Puritanism
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   e. Scotus Eriugena—the De Divisione Naturae
   f. Amaury of Chartres—the Third Dispensation
   g. The World of Darkness and Light—Extreme Cases
   h. Puritan Ideas, Hansard Knollys, Thomas Collier
   i. The Changing Content of the World of Light
7. Methods of Conviction
   a. The Münster Kingdom—Display of Luxury
   b. Sensual Conviction
   c. The Rival Speech
   d. Propaganda

Letter 8

Social Research
An International Quarterly of
Political and Social Science
66 West 12 Street
New York City
February 25, 1943

Dr. Eric Voegelin
Department of Government
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dr. Voegelin:

Thank you very much for your letter of February 20. It was only today that the Editorial Board of *Social Research* was able to reach a decision concerning your article. As I wrote in my previous letter, everyone enjoyed your unusually interesting article very much, but for the reasons which I stated in that letter, the Board did not feel able to accept it for publication in *Social Research*.

In spite of your refusal of the suggestion I made in my letter, I would urge you to consider whether you could write an article on the sectarian mentality in politics. Please let me know your decision as soon as you have reached it.[12]

Sincerely,

Leo Strauss
Associate Editor

Enc.

12. Voegelin's response, if made in a letter, is missing. From Letter 9, however, it would appear that he was unable to recast "The People of God" into a form acceptable to the editors of *Social Research*.

Letter 9

3900 Greystone Ave.,
New York City
9 May 1943

My dear Dr. Voegelin,

I am very sorry that you cannot write the article for *SR*—but we will take you at your word: you promise an article for *SR* immediately after the completion of your major work.

I read the table of contents with great interest, indeed with excitement.[13] A great achievement! You certainly do not leave out anything relevant. What I would have to say deals only with minor matters. For example, as to religion and mysticism, you should without question consult Scholem, *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, which just appeared. It goes incomparably deeper than Keiler, etc., etc., para. 5, 7. You speak of *Neo*platonism of the *falasifa*.[14] Within the history of political ideas (but also in the history of philosophy) it is to a certain extent misleading to do so, because the basis of their political doctrine is expressly Plato's own thoughts. I dealt with this in my small book *Philosophie und Gesetz* (Berlin, 1935)[15] and in several articles ("La science politique chez Maimonides et Farabi," *Revue des etudes juives*, 1936;[16] "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," *Isaac Abravanel, Six Lectures*, Cambridge, 1937). The mistaken view should really not be retained. As it concerns Marsilius, I have clarified—so I believe—his background somewhat in an essay, which should appear at the end of this year, and which I will gladly make available to you.[17] (Unfortunately, I do not have any

13. Presumably this refers to Voegelin's *History of Political Ideas*; see Letter 6, last paragraph.

14. On the Arab philosophers, compare Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maimonide et de Farabi," *Revue des etudes juives* 100 (1936): 1–37; *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), introduction; *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), ch. 5; and Voegelin, "Siger de Brabant," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944): 505–26.

15. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, trans. Fred Bauman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987).

16. "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maimonide et de Farabi," *Revue des etudes juives* 100 (1936): 1–37.

17. No publication of this essay seems to have taken place. Strauss did, however,

spare copies of the earlier publications, but they are easy to come by from the Library of Congress or the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.)

A word concerning our philosophical difference of opinion. You say: "You see, of course, how the phenomenological analysis (Husserl's) . . . has ended," p. 11 of the egology and so on.[18] That is, however, only one problem and not an important one at that: Husserl's phenomenological analysis ended in the radical analysis of the whole development of modern science (the essay in *Philosophia* and the essay on geometric evidence, as well as the great fragment on space consciousness in the Husserl Memorial Volume[19])—I know nothing in the literature of our century that would be comparable to this analysis in rigor, depth, and breadth. Husserl has seen with incomparable clarity that the restoration of philosophy or science—because he denies that that which today passes as science is genuine science—presupposes the restoration of the Platonic-Aristotelian level of questioning. His egology can be understood only as an answer to the Platonic-Aristotelian question regarding the *Nous*—and only on the level of this question is that answer to be discussed adequately.

In this is contained my answer to your question with regard to today's social science. An authentic beginning in the social sciences is impossible before the fundamental concepts are clarified, which means an awareness that the fundamental concepts—the very term "political," for example—are of Greek, and in particular of Greek philosophic origin; all that must be done before the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy is really understood again. I am quite of your opinion that both in Max Weber, as in your work, highly important insights are contained; but I would claim the same for Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, for example. The question concerns the *beginning*: clarity about the fundamental questions and how they should be

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publish another essay, "Marsilius of Padua," in Strauss and J. Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 276–95.

18. The reference is probably to Husserl's *Ideas* (1913); this remark attributed by Strauss to Voegelin, "You see . . . ," seems to be a paraphrase of Voegelin's view, not a quotation.

19. In 1936 an international philosophical yearbook, *Philosophia*, edited in Belgrade, published the first two parts of Husserl's last work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*; the work was first published in its entirety in 1954. The English translation is by David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970). The "Husserl Memorial Volume" probably refers to Marvin Farber, ed., *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940).

approached. The answer Plato and Aristotle gave to *this* question has been rejected since Hobbes (in a certain manner already since Machiavelli)—the anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian answer of the Enlightenment is seen as unacceptable from Rousseau on—but what was done was (in all cases known to me at least): to *complete* the answer of the Enlightenment or subsequently to *correct* it. The historical school, indeed every form of historicism, Hegel's dialectic, positivism of all kinds, Bergson, etc., etc., have this in common. Neo-Thomism is *in its intent* more radical—in its implementation, of course, it is of a low level, and not worth considering.

Dixi—I must close. Tomorrow evening I am supposed to give a public lecture on Machiavelli and I must still complete it.

Keep well!

With best wishes from us to you,

Leo Strauss

Letter 10

September 26, 1943

Dear Doctor Strauss:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of Farber's *Foundation of Phenomenology*;[20] I shall deliver the review before the end of the year, as agreed.

Felix Kaufmann[21] was kind enough to lend me his copy of Husserl's essay in *Philosophia*.[22] I have read it and feel now better fortified to tackle Farber's book. You will remember that you counseled me to read this essay in order to gain the proper perspective for Husserl's work, and I must say that, indeed, no other work of Husserl's has enlightened me so much on the motive of his thought. It is a grandiose piece of work, and you are probably right when you say that it is one of the most important, if not *the* most important, contribution of our time to philosophy. Nevertheless, I have some misgivings of a fundamental nature. Great importance can be

20. Marvin Farber, *The Foundation of Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943). Reviewed by Voegelin in *Social Research* 11 (1944): 384–87.

21. Kaufmann was a pupil of Husserl and friend of Voegelin from Vienna. Both Kaufmann and Voegelin were for a time associated with Hans Kelsen.

22. See above, n. 19.

attributed unqualifiedly to this work only if we assume the problem of epistemology to be the cardinal problem of philosophy. But is it? Certainly none of the great philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel would agree with this proposition. They all have treated epistemology as one of the most important, but after all only as *one*, of the philosophical complexes. What I find missing in the present article, as well as in the other published work of Husserl, is a foundation of his phenomenology in the larger context of a metaphysical system. The "egological sphere" is for him an ultimate sphere beyond which he permits no questions. Well—I like to ask a few questions beyond.

It is a pity I had not read this article before I came to New York; I should have liked very much to hear you explain your opinion on this point at greater length than is possible in correspondence. I have sent, however, an eleven-page critique of the article to Schütz;[23] if you are interested in it, he will certainly let you have the letter.

You would oblige me greatly if you could give me the titles of your books and articles typewritten; I am afraid I could not decipher them properly in handwriting.

With our best regards to you and Mrs. Strauss,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

Appendix to Letter 10

Letter from Voegelin to Alfred Schütz on Edmund Husserl

September 17, 1943

Dear Friend:

Let me thank you heartily for the beautiful evening we were able to spend with you and your wife. Unfortunately the time was so short that we were not able to speak about many things that interest us both very much.

23. Originally published in Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1966), 21–36. An English translation follows. Alfred Schütz and Voegelin were close friends from their university days. In 1943 Schütz taught at the New School. See Helmut Wagner, *Alfred Schütz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), chs. 6 and 12.

Just now I find it very painful that I cannot come to an understanding with you by means of a conversation. Kaufmann was so kind as to lend me Husserl's essay on the "Crisis of the European Sciences" from volume 1 of *Philosophia.*[24] I have just read it and would like very much to speak to you about it. Allow me at least a few brief comments—you will probably not have time to go into them in detail; but perhaps it may be possible for you to correct me if I have misunderstood Husserl.

Before everything: the general impression is of greatness—not only in comparison with other philosophical production of our time but also in comparison with many other works of Husserl. Husserl abstains in a most satisfactory manner from all studied foolery ("great" and "toilsome" investigations, etc.), which spoils many pages of the *Ideas*; and he exudes the sweat of "philosophical existence" only two or three times. Despite the dryness of the language, the essay lives in an Olympian atmosphere of the purest philosophical enthusiasm. The control of the material is masterly; the treatment of the problem of the Galilean worldview and the reductions that lead to physicalism are unsurpassably clear; and the problem of transcendental subjectivity as the theme of philosophy since Descartes has never become so clear to me as on this occasion. The criticism of the earlier attempts at putting the transcendental question seems completely right, and correspondingly, the elaboration of the "egological" sphere and the grounding of the objectivity of the world in the operations of the transcendental ego seem to have completely succeeded. You see that I am prepared to acknowledge this essay as the most significant epistemological performance of our time.

Nevertheless, this essay has disappointed me just as much as the other works of Husserl—for epistemology is an eminently important theme of philosophy, but it does not exhaust the area of the philosophical, and in this area it is neither a self-sufficient theme nor a sphere in which all other philosophical problems take their root, as if with the foundation of an epistemology, a philosophy is also founded. The essay is, just as the *Logical Investigations* and as the *Ideas*, a prolegomenon to a philosophy, but is not itself the undertaking of an established philosophy. Of course it is possible to argue against this with the objection that the great revelations are to be found in the as yet unpublished works of Husserl. But I have been hearing this argument for the last twenty years, and it would make me distrustful

24. References in the text are to the English translation by David Carr. See above, n. 19. The translation is altered slightly.

that a great thinker did not even once, to the end of his life, in the course of a widely published production, touch upon a single fundamental philosophical problem. On the basis of this argument regarding further publications from unpublished manuscripts, it seems to me that we can expect nothing that would enhance in any unexpected way what we already know of Husserl's circle of themes, however valuable the unpublished manuscripts may still be as logical and epistemological studies. I believe, however, that from the essay we have before us itself, grounds can be clearly made that there is nothing more to expect that would be fundamental in the philosophical sense.

(1) In this essay, Husserl develops an image of history—in its general lines not different from the image of history in the Vienna lecture, which I heard. This image is Victorian. The relevant history of mankind comes from Greek antiquity and from modern times since the Renaissance. The Hellenistic period, Christianity, the Middle Ages—an insignificant time period of no more than two thousand years—are a superfluous interlude; the Indians and the Chinese (placed in quotation marks by Husserl) are a slightly ridiculous curiosity on the periphery of the globe, in the center of which is Western man simply as Man. Man is rational being. "Philosophy and science would accordingly be the historical movement through which universal reason, 'only-begotten' in humanity as such, is revealed" (pp. 15–16). In Greek humanity, the entelechy of humanity has arrived at its breakthrough (p. 15). After the Greek original foundation of philosophy and the two-thousand-year interval, in which the entelechy obviously amused itself elsewhere, the new foundation was performed by Descartes. Because of certain imperfections, excellently analyzed by Husserl, the Cartesian new foundation took the wrong path; Kant made a good but partial start in bringing it back on the right track again; we leave out the philosophy of German Idealism and the Romantics; and then we come to the final foundation in Husserlian transcendentalism.

(2) I do not believe that much can be said in defense of this impoverished vision of the spiritual history of mankind; but it could be objected that it is the pardonable naïveté of a great systematic philosopher and that its essential achievement is untouched, that it is perhaps improper to dwell too explicitly on it. On the contrary, I would emphatically object that any German philosopher, who after Hegel knows no better than to take up the problem of the historicity of spirit is, on this basis alone, and as is evident from this essay, a philosopher of dubious quality. But I will

abstain from this argument. It seems more important to me, that, as the essay shows, this image of history is not a pardonable, systematically inessential derailment, but rather constitutes the immediate presupposition of the Husserlian thematic.

Section 15 (pp. 70ff.) contains the "Reflections on the method of our historical mode of investigation," which is rich in conclusions. The principles of this method are the following:

(a) The historical becoming of philosophy has a teleology.

(b) This teleology can be "extrapolated" from the historical forms of philosophizing.

(c) The teleology, which has been "extrapolated" and brought to clarity, makes it possible to formulate the telos itself and to make this the task of contemporary philosophy (Husserl's).

(d) This personal philosophical task opens up from the understanding of the telos into the history of the spirit of modern times.

(e) The task does not, however, become historically relative. It is not a matter of classification in a "merely causal succession." The telos is timeless and merely unfolds itself in historical becoming.

(f) The philosopher's existence receives through this a particularly dialectical character, revealed by Husserl in the following two theses:

(aa) "We are through and through nothing other than the result of historical-spiritual becoming.

"Such a kind of enlightening of history as a further inquiry with regard to the original foundation of goals that bind together the chain of future generations . . . is nothing other than the genuine self-reflection of the philosopher on what he is truly seeking, from which he authentically wills to set out what in him is will *from* the will and *as* the will of his spiritual forefathers. That means to make vital again in its hidden historical meaning the sedimented conceptuality that is taken for granted as the basis of his private and nonhistorical work."

(bb) "To every original foundation belongs essentially a final foundation assigned as a task by the historical process. This is accomplished when the task has arrived at perfect clarity, and with that, at an apodictic method, that at every step of the realization is the constant avenue to new steps, *which have the*

> *character of absolute success, that is the character of apodictic steps. At this point philosophy as an infinite task would consequently have arrived at its apodictic beginning, at its horizon of apodictic forward movement.*" (Underlined by me [—E.V.])

(g) The "final foundation" is to be distinguished from the self-reflection that is carried on by every historic philosopher in order to fix his place with his fellow philosophers in the past and the present. The self-interpretations of all other philosophers do not teach us where "it" comes in the history of philosophy. The telos of history reveals itself only in the final-foundational interpretation, which is performed by Husserl; and with his help the philosophers of the past can be understood better than they understood themselves.

(h) It follows from the privileged position of the final-foundational, teleological consideration of history, that it cannot be contradicted by historical arguments (of the kind, e.g., that a philosopher interpreted by Husserl had in fact, and provable philologically, intended something quite different to what Husserl imputed to him on the basis of his knowledge of the telos). In the evidence of the critical total view there flashes up behind the "historical facts" of the history of philosophy for the first time the meaningful harmony of the historical movement.

(3) The relation between the systematic task of the transcendental philosophy and the history of philosophy is summarized in the formula:

> "In *our* philosophizing, we are *functionaries of humanity*" (p. 17) and "We are just what we are, as functionaries of modern philosophical humanity, as heirs and bearers together of the direction of the will that pervades it, and we are that from an original foundation, which is however at the same time a subsequent foundation and modification of the Greek original foundation. In this lies the *teleological beginning*, the true birth of the European spirit" (p. 71).

There are only a few things to mention with regard to this formulation, along with the principles of Section 15. And I am anxious, as you can well imagine, to hold back any strong remarks I might be tempted to make, as, e.g., that I have a prejudice against functionaries in general, and so, I do not distinguish sufficiently between functionaries of the national socialist party and functionaries of humanity; or that the functionaries of the party

slaughter humanity, while the functionaries of humanity do not see deep enough into the nature of evil in order to see at least one of its roots in the nature of the functionary—but Lissy says that it would be terribly mean to thank you for the wonderful meal on the Champs Elysées by sending a criticism of Husserl, and if I must in fact do this, then it should at least have no "humorous touches." So let us be serious.

However, a serious analysis of the Husserlian position has its difficulties, for the formulation of his position is indeed perfectly clear verbally, but in no way intellectually. Husserl was no radical philosopher in the sense that he became clear about the *radices* of his thinking; his radicalism, which he always emphasized, is not a radicalism of philosophical existence but the radicalism of the pursuit of a specific problem, that of transcendental philosophy. He seems to me now to have pursued this special question to its root (and as far as this goes, his pathos of radicalism is genuine); the question, however, which, as far as I can see, Husserl in his published works has not once even touched upon, is whether the advance toward the objectivity of knowledge of the world—to its root in the constituting subjectivity of the ego—is in fact an advance toward the basic problems of philosophy. With regard to this point, Husserl seems to me to be absolutely naive. The clarity of the linguistic formulation in the essay under consideration conceals a world of actual implications that must be fully unfolded in order to understand Husserl's own position adequately. In the space of a letter, such an unfolding is not now possible and, I am afraid, in another form, with the scope it would require, is not worth the trouble. I must, therefore, limit myself to clearing away just a few of the concealed layers with brief indications, and leave it to your imagination to expand the backgrounds and explanations.

(a) At the uppermost and most general level, there is Husserl's teleology of history, to be classified as an instance of Averroistic speculation. I have treated this theme in detail in my *Autoritären Staat*[25] in relation to the national socialistic and fascist speculation; and the article "Siger de Brabant,"[26] which you probably remember better, attempts to make clear what I mean by this. In Western philosophy we have to distinguish two basic positions with regard to the nature of man, which through the Christian-orthodox attitude of Thomas and the heterodoxy of Siger arrive at their clearest representation.

25. *Der autoritäre Staat* (Vienna: Springer, 1936).
26. "Siger de Brabant," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944): 505–26.

In the Thomistic position, the accent lies on the singularity of the human substance (*intellectus*); in Siger, on the world soul, of which the individual human substance is a particle. Both positions derive historically from Aristotle's teaching on the soul (*De Anima* III), where this question is left in suspense, so that in fact either position can be traced to *De Anima*.

I name in a summarizing way "Averroistic" the position that accepts the world soul and the corresponding character of the individual soul as a particle, because Averroës' commentary on Aristotle is the most important literary-historic source of the formation of this position in the West since the thirteenth century. I am, of course, quite aware that Averroës did not develop this position originally, but that the Zenonian philosophy of the world logos and the *apospasmata* in the individual soul contained it in principle. The Averroistic position in this sense has now gone through many different developments and derivations. The collective soul can be understood in relation to the individual souls, as in Zeno, or the collective can be transferred to the world itself, e.g., as the rational entelechy of human development toward perfection, which makes up an essential component in the Kantian philosophy of history; and it can emerge as a particular, intramundane collectivity, as in the collective speculations of communism, national socialism, and fascism.

Husserl's collectivist telos of philosophical reason should be qualified in the coordinative system of these Averroistic variations as follows: Insofar as the collective telos of Husserl is a rational or spiritual substance, it remains close to the Stoic logos or the Averroistic intellectus. The problem of philosophy becomes then simply the problem of the spirit, and insofar as the spirit is the nature of man, the problem becomes identified with the problem of man in its fully developed form. "The real spiritual struggles of European humanity take the form of *struggles between the philosophies*" (p. 5). Humanity, however, as these and other passages (see especially pp. 15–16) show, is narrowed to European humanity and distinguished from "merely empirical anthropological types" like the Chinese and the Indian (p. 16). The problem of humanity is consequently shifted from its Zenonian, Averroistic, or Kantian generality, into the historic, and "Man" becomes a finite historical phenomenon of certain periods of the history of mankind, namely, of

antiquity and modern times. (Medieval man is also permitted, although this is not said explicitly, to appear as a "mere anthropological type" like that of the Chinese or the Indian). Through this contraction of mankind to the community of those who philosophize together in the Husserlian sense, the philosophic telos draws near to the particular intramundane collectivity of the type of the Marxian proletariat, the Hitlerian German *Volk*, or Mussolini's *Italianà*.

(b) Husserl's collectivistic-historical metaphysics has its consequences for his historical method. In the contradiction of the collective to the small section of genuine humanity, there is implied the historical irrelevance of the preponderant quantity of human history, under the rubric of the "merely anthropological." But also within the small relevant section there is a future differentiation of relevance. Among the various possibilities that remain open, Husserl chooses his own, motivated by the spectacle of the succession of philosophical systems that come and go without any of them becoming definitive. Is the history of philosophy (which is indeed identical with the history of the humanly relevant spirit) therefore meaningless? Or is there an order, and with that order, a meaning, in history? His answer is the *telos* that is originally founded and that unfolds itself ever more clearly to its apodictic final foundation through a variety of dramatic ways. Or translated from Husserlian language into a more vulgar one: Husserl is a philosopher of progress in the best style of the time at which the German Empire was set up and about which Nietzsche had some telling things to say. Every progress philosophy that starts from the supposition of a self-unfolding *telos* has an important problem of relevance to solve, which had already deeply troubled Kant. Kant had also come up against the problem of a reason that unfolded itself in history in an unending progress toward fulfillment. In his *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*[27] he thought out the notion of unfolding and expressed in a decisive passage his "distaste" [for the supposition] that the earlier generations of mankind are, so to say, steps on which the later, fulfilled generation ascends onward toward its goal. Does this supposition mean that man is historically

27. Trans. H. B. Nisbet, in H. Reiss, ed., *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 41–53.

only a means to a goal that only the last generation of mankind will attain? Kant lets the matter rest with his "distaste." He would wish to be indeed systematic, but he is, however, not emotionally impelled to confront this question decisively. For the Averroistic conception is only a component of his general system, and the meaning of the individual human life at every single moment of history is at all events resolved for him satisfactorily through the belief in the immortality of the soul and its status of fulfillment in the beyond. In addition, the privilege of the later generations did not impinge so crassly on Kant, since along with the supposition of unending progress toward fulfillment, there was also the fact that every empirical-historical generation shares with every other the fate of imperfection.

The problem is somewhat different for Husserl. Like Kant, he believes in the progress of reason in the sense of the unfolding of the telos in history. But he does not believe in unending progress. His final foundation does not lie in an unendingly distant point but is performed here and now in Husserl's phenomenology. Philosophy has arrived at its "apodictic beginning" (p. 71) with the establishment of phenomenology, and the unending task of philosophy (which is his also) takes place in the "horizon of apodictic continuation." As a result, we have to distinguish in Husserl's history of reason two phases: the first reaches from the Greeks, through Descartes's renewed, original foundation, to the Husserlian final foundation; the second begins with Husserl as the apodictic continuation of his apodictic final foundation. We can remind ourselves now that the entelechy "achieved its breakthrough for the first time among Greek humanity" (p. 15), so that history before the Greeks is a prehistory of genuine humanity. Thus we have altogether three phases, and the Husserlian philosophy of history appears as a typical three-phase philosophy, the Old Testament (pre-Greek), New Testament (since the Greek original foundation), and Evangelium Aeternum (beginning with the Husserlian final foundation). The final phase, of unending continuation of phenomenological philosophy in the horizon of apodictic final foundation, has the same structure in the history of philosophy as the Marxian final reign or the Hitlerian millennium.

Husserl's attitude toward the New Testament period (from original foundation on to final foundation) is worth more particular

consideration. Kant had some uneasiness, a "distaste," that the generations before the final reign should be only points of transition for reason, helpful and perhaps necessary on the way toward fulfillment but without absolute value in themselves. This feature of Kantian humanity is lacking in Husserl. That the Greeks and modern philosophy since Descartes are only the historical manure for the soil from which the flower of the Husserlian final foundation blooms does not seem "distasteful" to him in the least; this relation is only as it should be. The raising of this question should, however, in no way be the preparation for contesting Husserl's humanity—the problem lies deeper than that. The lack of the Kantian humanitarian "distaste," the lack of inner protest against considering history as prehistory, and allowing, with the final foundation, a "real history" (Lenin) to begin—in Husserl's language: an "apodictic" history—places Husserl, on the contrary, beyond the progress-problematic of the eighteenth century, with its implications of humanity, and makes it necessary to place him among the messianic representations of a final age to be found in our time. Husserl's "apodictic" history, just as the "real" history of communism, is not a continuation of empirical history (see Husserl's passionate warding off of any attempt at allowing his teleological interpretation of history to be confronted by empirical-historical arguments) but a transposition of history onto a new level of the revelation of the spirit of man, with which a new apodicity begins. Along with the specific and problematic component of transcendental subjectivity, Husserl's radicalism has a messianic component by virtue of which the final foundation, with its apodicity in the area of the historical and social, becomes the establishment of a philosopher's sect in the final phase of history.

In order to give an account of the particular structure of the Husserlian metaphysics it was necessary to refer to its frequent parallel phenomena in the political sphere. Beyond its structural relationship with national socialism or communism, Husserl's metaphysics of history has, however, naturally no more to do with them than, for example, Joachim de Flora, whose phasing of history passes through a similar process. In another, methodological relationship, Husserl's position is closely related to certain contemporary spiritual manifestations of the spirit—I mean, to the historical methodology of the Southwest German school, and even more to the historical works that are oriented toward this methodology. The works of

political history are less relevant in this connection than a classic of history of the spirit, such as Gierke's *Law of Partnership*.[28] The *ratio* of this work is Gierke's supposition that the nature of a political society is its character as a "real person," and the history of political and legal ideas must therefore be selected so that the historical facts will be ordered as a chain of development leading to the unfolding of the idea of the "real person." Gierke therefore chooses those crumbs from an enormous amount of historical material, which more or less happily allow themselves to be ordered in this series—it does not matter what these crumbs have meant in the context of the author, or what material must consequently fall under the table. That is Husserl's method, even though Gierke lacked the terminological apparatus of entelechy, original foundation, and final foundation. As a result Gierke ran into difficulties when Dunning was sufficiently tactless to examine his fantastic treatment of Bodin more closely. As a result Gierke found himself compelled to publish an embarrassed *retractatio* in the third edition of his *Althusius*.[29] What Dunning did in Bodin's case could be carried out on almost every one of the authors treated by Gierke. Husserl would not suffer this malheur, because from the very beginning he rejected empirical-historical arguments against his telos. I would, therefore, say that the demonic obsession of Gierke's time, for treating world history as a preparatory work for the glory of the respective present, in this case, Gierke's, has been surpassed by Husserl's messianic position, which refuses any correction from the empirical material. Gierke could still be criticized by referring to the material he interpreted; Husserl cannot be criticized, since his interpretation of history *ex definitione* cannot be false. I speak of a "demonic" writing of history because the historian absolutizes his own spiritual position with its historical limitedness and "really" does not write history but misuses the material of history as historical supports for his own position. The task of a non-misusing the history of spirit is to penetrate every historical spiritual position to its own point of rest, i.e., to where it is deeply rooted in the experiences of transcendence of the thinker

28. *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* is a four-volume monument of German scholarship. It has been translated in parts under separate titles.

29. *Johannes Althusius und die Entwicklung der naturrechtlichen Staatstheorien* (Breslau: Winkle, 1913).

in question. Only when the history of spirit is carried on with this methodological aim can it attain its philosophical aim, which is to understand the spirit in its historicity or, formulated in another way, to understand the historical forms of the spirit as variations on the theme of experience of transcendence. These variations succeed one another in an empirical and factual way, not arbitrarily; they do not constitute an anarchic series; they permit the recognition of sequences of order, even though the order is somewhat more complicated than the progress metaphysicians would wish it to be. (It is obvious that I cannot go into the actual orders here.) A genuine historical reflection does not have the task that Gierke in his historiographic action and Husserl in his theory ascribe to it, which is to explain one's own precious position as the sediment of history (even though this self-interpretation is a valuable consequence of historical reflection). Rather, the primary task of genuine historical reflection is to penetrate the spiritual-historical form of the other to its experience of transcendence, and in such penetration to train and clarify one's own formation of transcendent experience. Spiritual-historical understanding is a catharsis, a *purificatio* in the mystical sense, with the personal goal of *illuminatio* and *unio mystica*; in fact, if it deals systematically with great chains of material, it can lead to the working out of sequences of order in the historical revelation of spirit; finally it can in this way in fact produce a philosophy of history. The guides to this understanding, however, which cannot allow any moment to be abandoned, are the "self-testimonies" of the thinker—those very self-testimonies that Husserl not only believes to have no rights but that he systematically avoided as disturbing his teleology.

(4) The most important implications of the Husserlian position have now been explained, and I can now in a few words approach the fundamental material question: the relation between Husserl and Descartes. Husserl is of the opinion that modern philosophy has been originally founded by Descartes and finally founded by himself. The final foundation brings the original foundation to its full unfolding. To prove this thesis, Husserl interprets the Cartesian *Meditations* as an imperfect form of the phenomenological reduction, the goal of which is an epoche of the world content in order to reconstitute the world as objective from the egological sphere. This interpretation is partially correct. The methodological elimination of

the world content and the suspension of judgment in order to find the Archimedean point from which the world can build up again is in fact the theme of the *Meditations*. Husserl's critique is also correct: that the epistemological epoche is not carried out radically and that the psychological "I" is made the point of departure for the reconstitution of the world instead of the transcendental ego. However, the assertion that Husserl makes, in reference to the historical telos, that the Cartesian reduction has no other positive meaning beyond the epistemological, which must later lead to the grounding of a transcendental philosophy, is false; and further, the assertion—that the attainment of certainty regarding the objectivity of the world by the roundabout route of the certainty of the existence of God collapses because the Cartesian proof of God is untenable—is also false.

Husserl's misinterpretations are due to his substituting his own philosophical theme, of the epoche of the world in order to attain the transcendental sphere of the ego, for Descartes's own and exclusive theme, even if he intended this only unclearly and imperfectly. In fact, the Cartesian meditation has a far richer content, which incidentally raises the question whether it can even be applied to the unfolding of that problematic. For a start, the Cartesian meditation is not as shockingly new in its principal form as Husserl believes. Descartes's meditation is in principle a Christian meditation in the traditional style; it can even be further classified as a meditation of the Augustinian type, and has been made hundreds of times in the history of the human spirit since Augustine. The anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (a meditation of the fourteenth century) has formulated the classic theme of the meditation in the following sentence: "It is needful for thee to bury in a cloud of forgetting all creatures that ever God made, that thou mayest direct thine intent to God Himself." The goal of the meditation is the gradual elimination of the world content, from the bodily world to the animate, in order to attain the point of transcendence, in which the soul can, in Augustinian language, turn itself in the *intentio* toward God. This meditation is primarily a process in the biography of the individual who performs it; and the keeping at the point of transcendence and the *intentio* are an experience of brief duration. Secondarily, the process can be expressed verbally, and this gives rise to the literary form of the meditation. Conversely, the reenactment of a meditation that has been put down in words makes possible again an originary meditation in the reader. The Cartesian meditation is the literary sediment of an ordinary meditation of this type, up to the point, indeed, where the momentary character of the

lingering at the point of transcendence is employed in a literary way for articulation in most of the meditations. The first meditation ends with the complaint: "I fall back insensibly into my former opinions," namely, into his belief in the objectivity of the world content, although the very aim of the meditation was to become free of this content, since such liberation alone makes possible the experience of the *realissimum* in the *intentio*.

To be sure, there is something new in the Cartesian meditation—if there were nothing new, Husserl's interpretation would not be only partially, but totally false. The classical style of meditation begins from the *contemptus mundi*; the objectivity of the world is unfortunately so obvious that the meditation is needed as an instrument of liberation from it; through the meditation the Christian thinker assures himself, if not of the unreality, at least of the irrelevance of the world content. The classic Christian thinker *wills in the meditation not to know the world*, and therefore its objectivity is not an epistemological problem for him. Descartes finds himself in the position in the history of the spirit where he *wants* to know the world, without ceasing at the same time to be a Christian thinker. Therefore, on the one hand, he can perform the Christian meditation, and on the other hand, he can *use* this meditation with its epoche of the world to assure himself again, from the "Archimedean point" of the experience of transcendence, of the reality of the world he has previously annihilated in the meditation. The Christian experience of transcendence has for Descartes the same significance, as indispensible presupposition of the objectivity of the world, as had Plato's mystical view of ideas, as the indispensible presupposition of his idealist epistemology. I would therefore formulate as being new in Descartes: that the sentiment of *contemptus mundi* gives way to the sentiment of interest in the world, and that from the care about *epistēmē*, the transcendent experience becomes in the meditation the instrument for making certain the objectivity of the world.

Husserl misunderstands this problematic fundamentally because he stumbles over the proof for God and does not see, beyond the proof for God, the experiential content of the experience of transcendence. It is a well-known fact in the history of philosophy, even if obviously not to Husserl, that the scholastic proofs for God, including the Cartesian, do not have the aim of assuring the thinker who employs this proof of the existence of God. The existence of God for the Christian thinkers from Anselm of Canterbury to Descartes is known from other sources. The proof is, however, the stylistic form of scholastic thinking, and the *demonstratio* in this style is extended to problems that are not susceptible of a

demonstratio, and in no way need one. Certainly all the proofs of God are logically untenable—but none of the proofs of God were quite as stupid as they must appear after a reading of Kant. In the proof for God, there can of course be found, even in Descartes, the purely descriptive nondemonstrative report of the experience of transcendence, on which alone it meditatively depends. In the *Third Meditation* there can be read: "In some way I have the notion of the infinite before that of the finite, that is to say, of God before that of myself; for how could it be possible that I could know that I doubt and that I desire, that is to say, that something is lacking to me and that I am not wholly perfect, if I did not have in me any ideas of a being more perfect than my own, by comparison with which I knew the deficiencies of my nature?" The existence of God is therefore not conclusion, but, in the experience of the finitude of human nature, the infinite is given. God cannot be in doubt, for in the experience of doubt and of imperfection, God is implied. In the limit-experience of being finite there is given, along with this side of the limit, the beyond.

Descartes's *ego cogitans* is thus truly significant. Husserl saw two of these meanings correctly. He saw (1) the transcendental ego, which, turned toward the world content, has in its *cogitationes* the *intentio* toward the *cogitata*; (2) the psychological ego, the soul as world content, which Descartes, as Husserl correctly criticizes, allowed to slide into the transcendental ego. What Husserl did not see is the third meaning of the ego, which grounds the first two, the ego as the *anima animi* in the Augustinian sense, whose *intentio* does not turn toward the *cogitata* but toward transcendence. It is in the third meaning that the process of meditation has its primary sense; in the transcendence of the Augustinian *intentio*, that "I" is simultaneously certain of itself and of God (not in a dogmatic sense, but in a mystical sense of transcendence in the Ground). And only from *this* assurance can the egological sphere in Husserl's sense be founded, with its *intentio* going in the opposed direction toward the *cogitata*—whatever form this assurance may then receive in metaphysical speculation. (It is also important to compare the derivation of Hegel's dialectic as one of the possible constructions of the founding, from the mystic Jakob Böhme, and explicitated by Hegel in the *History of Philosophy*.)

So Husserl has isolated the egological problem from the Cartesian meditative complex, developing it in a masterly way in his theory of transcendentality. And this relation to Descartes seems to me to be at the root of the peculiarity of the Husserlian position. Husserl never performed an originary meditation in Descartes's sense—despite his pretended radi-

calism and his postulate of [being] the new beginning for every [subsequent] philosopher. He has *historically adopted* the reduction of the world from the cogitating ego and cannot therefore ground his own transcendental philosophical position from an originary bestowing metaphysics. The limit he never gets beyond is the founding subjectivity of the ego: where the ego gets its function of founding the objectivity of the world from subjectivity remains not only unexplained but inevitably is hardly touched on. Instead of the higher founding in the experience of transcendence, there enters the founding in the intramundane particularity of one of the epistemological problematics established by Descartes. Whether Husserl was unresponsive with regard to experiences of transcendence, whether he shrank back from them, whether it is a matter of a biographical problem (that he had withdrawn from Jewish religiousness and did not wish to enter into the Christian)—I do not know. At all events, to found his position, he has taken the way out in the immanence of a historical problematic and with the greatest care blocked himself off from the philosophical problem of transcendence—the decisive problem of philosophy. For this reason, then, there come from a philosopher of rank what appear to be the curiosities of interpretations of history through the telos revealed in him; for this reason the justification of his position as functionary of this telos; for this reason the inability to find the Archimedean point, which he could not find for himself, in the philosophy of others; for this reason the apparent inhumanity in the humiliation of his predecessors; and for this reason—I would also believe—the constantly preparatory character of his work.

Despite all this, I will not in the least—I hope I do not have to say in a more detailed way—contest Husserl's brilliant philosophical talents. He has certainly in a most successful way done all that a thinker can do within the context of a historically fixed problematic, without rising in an originary way to the level of the fundamental problem of philosophizing.

I have come to the end. As I said at the start, I am afraid that you will hardly have the time to go into these questions in detail. Even if you do not, this critique can provide the basis for a conversation when we see each other again—and in the meantime it was a cathartic exercise for me.

With many thanks for all the love that you and your wife showed us, and with the sincerest greetings,

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

(Concluded on 20 September 1943)

Letter 11

Social Research
66 West 12 Street
New York City
October 11, 1943

Dr. Eric Voegelin
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dr. Voegelin:

Thank you very much for your letter of September 26. I look forward to seeing your review of Farber's book by Christmas or so. I am sure it will be a very interesting and worthwhile review.

On your advice I asked Dr. Schütz for your critique of Husserl. It is, of course, a very interesting piece of work; I admire the quickness and the energy of your reaction. You thoroughly succeed in showing the inadequacy of certain aspects or views that deform the surface of Husserl's thesis. I believe, however, that you do not do full justice to Husserl's fundamental intention and the important thread of his argument. You certainly overestimated the significance of the "epistemological" and *"geschichtlich-philosophischen" Eierschalen* owing to the situation from which Husserl started.[30] The decisive point in Husserl is the critique of modern science in the light of genuine science, that is to say, Platonic-Aristotelian [science]. His work can only be understood in the light of the enormous difficulties in which Platonic-Aristotelian science culminated, [namely,] the problem of the *nous*. Considering the enormous difficulties of understanding *De Anima* III, 5ff., Husserl's egological foundation of the ontologies is at least excusable. Incidentally, I think it is impossible to call Husserl's procedure Averroistical; there is no "ego" of fundamental significance in Averroës. And so I could go on and on. I disagree with your interpretation of the meaning of demonstrations of the existence of God, which to my mind had a much more serious and crucial meaning than you seem to assign to them. But we must reserve a proper discussion of these grave issues to a personal meeting.

30. This letter was written in English. Strauss's meaning is that Voegelin overestimated the significance of Husserl's dubious historical-philosophical starting point. *Eierschalen* means eggshells, as in the expression "to walk on eggshells"; using a similar metaphor, one could say that in Voegelin's opinion Husserl started out on thin ice, whereas in Strauss's opinion that ice was thicker.

As regards my medieval studies, I can mention: *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Berlin, 1935; "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maimonide et de Farabi," *Revue des etudes juives*, 1936; "The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed," *Maimonides Memorial Volume*, Columbia, 1941; "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*" (to appear this year—I shall send you a reprint)[31]—My wife and I send you and Mrs. Voegelin our very best regards.

Yours very sincerely,

Leo Strauss

Letter 12

June 7, 1944

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Excuse me that I only thank you today for your fine essay on "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*." A colleague of mine was ill and I had a double teaching load; only now at the end of the semester do I have some breathing space.

I can say nothing critical about your essay. It concerns what is for me a foreign world, and I can only learn. But what there is to learn highly interests me. Above all the form of religious discourse. Unfortunately I know too little of the eastern literature; but religious discourses come to my mind, that were reported by Rubrouck[32] (at the court of the Mongol Khans). Do you know perhaps more about it, whether this form occurs more often? I have the impression that this type of discourse, which actually happened, as well as the ones that were fictional, at the intersection of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, etc., is the prototype of the later Western discourses on tolerance—sociologically very interesting is also the position of Johnson, that only through religion is social order possible[33]—and I am especially grateful for the fact that your essay does not again remind me of Goethe's statement on belief and nonbelief as the main theme of world history. The whole part on Israel in the desert—in the notes to the *Divan*—is a fine specimen.

31. "The Literary Character of *The Guide for the Perplexed*," in S. W. Baron, ed., *Essays on Maimonides* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 13 (1943): 47–96. Both are reprinted in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

32. William of Rubruquis or Rubrouck was a thirteenth-century papal envoy to the Mongol court.

33. Alvin Johnson of the New School for Social Research.

In about two weeks I will pass through New York on my way to Cambridge; maybe we can see each other at this occasion. In any case, I will phone you.

In the meantime, warmest greetings from both of us to you and your dear wife.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 13

3202 Oxford Ave.,
New York 63, N.Y.
21.4.45

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Just a hastily dashed down word of thanks for your kind lines. You pleased me all the more, as I believed that, especially with regard to the classics, a radical opposition of views stood between us.

It would be very nice if we could discuss this and other things in June. We now live directly next to Hula—maybe you could arrange this time to visit me.

With best wishes from us to you,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 14

October 16, 1946

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your letter of the eleventh of this month. I was very pleased with your reaction to my critique of Wild.[34] One must proceed with these public castigations from time to time. Perhaps here and there they have their uses.

I made immediate efforts to look at your critique of Schuman.[35]

34. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," *Social Research* 13 (1946): 326–67.

35. Voegelin, review of *Soviet Politics, at Home and Abroad,* by Fred L. Schuman, *Journal of Politics* 8 (1946): 212–20.

Unfortunately, we do not have it (that is, the journal) in our library, and I cannot use other libraries. Could you lend me a copy for twenty-four hours? I would send it back immediately.

In case I see you, I would very much like to confer with you about a small investigation I completed for over a year ago but have not been able to place over here. It is the first attempt to interpret Xenophon's dialogue on tyrants (the *Hiero*).[36] It leads to results that are not very interesting for the man in the street but about which I am not so indifferent: ancient political theory appears in a different light. It seemed for a moment as if *Traditio* would publish the work (130 typed pages); the editors turned it down but without very persuasive reasons. And with completely American publishers and so on I have no connections. Could you be of help? The matter is not urgent: I write to you about it merely because by chance you might just now be aware of something.

Warm greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 15

The Graduate Faculty of
Political & Social Science
66 West 12th Street
New York 11
Gramercy 7-8464
November 11, 1947

Professor Eric Voegelin
741 Canal Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dr. Voegelin:

You have obliged me very much by letting me have your article,[37] which I read at once and found very interesting. I am in full agreement with the thesis developed by you on page 311. On the other hand, I have difficulties

36. Strauss, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon's "Hiero,"* Foreword by Alvin Johnson (New York: Political Science Classics, 1948).

37. Voegelin, "Plato's Egyptian Myth," *Journal of Politics* 9 (1947): 307–24.

in following you in what you suggest in the latter part of the article. I intend to let you have my very detailed criticism some time in spring when I am studying again the *Republic*. Permit me for the moment some very general and rather unsubstantiated remarks. I think that the quarrel between philosophy and poetry may be understood on Plato's terms, philosophy meaning *the* quest for *the* truth (a quest that, for everyone who understands what that means, is an erotic affair), and poetry meaning something else, i.e., at best the quest for a particular kind of truth. I wonder whether one can say, as you do, that *Rep.* 607B "can hardly mean anything but a reference to the attacks of Heraclitus and Xenophanes on Homer and Hesiod." At least as important is the attack of Aristophanes on Socrates; in fact the central theme of Aristophanes can be said to be, not only in the *Clouds*, the question of the superiority of philosophy or of poetry. Also what you say page 318, bottom, "since the Egyptian myth is Plato's invention, Solon is Plato himself," appears to be a *non sequitur*.[38]

I am so crowded with my schedule that I cannot even touch on the questions of principles involved in my scanty remarks.

Repeating my thanks for your stimulating study, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Leo Strauss

LS:ES

Letter 16

March 18, 1948

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your article on "The Intention of Rousseau."[39] I immediately read the *First Discourse* again, and I believe that you have indeed formulated the problem absolutely correctly. Particularly valuable seems to me to be the careful distinction between goodness and virtue, and the further division of goodness into that of the primitive man and that of the philosopher. To that which you yourself indicate, I have hardly anything critical to note; I can only agree. In the rereading of the *Discourse*, certain relations nevertheless came to mind, which were earlier not so clear to me and which perhaps might be acceptable as supplements.

38. Compare Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 3, *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 179–80.

39. Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," *Social Research* 14 (1947): 455–87.

I mean the noticeable parallel between Rousseau's critique of civilization and Vico. There is little chance of any literary influence. Highly interesting to me is the apparent parallel between Rousseau's appraisal of science and Vico's "Barbarism of Reflection," as also the parallel between Rousseau's virtue and Vico's unbrokenness of "myth." Rousseau's efforts on behalf of a civil religion appear to me substantially an exposition concerning the problem of myth (in Vico's meaning) and its decomposition through reflection.—But details of this parallel would extend too far for a letter.

As I am writing to you, I do not want to let the opportunity pass, again to send you a manuscript with the question if you think it to be fit for publication in *Social Research*.[40] Were it not for this letter, I would not have sent it; do not then take the submission too seriously; if it doesn't appear appropriate to you (especially because it is perhaps too long), send it back without ceremony or apologies. It is a piece of the large work, but complete in itself. If it appears generally usable, I would take on the following changes:

1) The present first two pages would be replaced with an introduction, which would make the article self-sufficient.

2) All references to other parts of the large manuscript would be replaced simply by footnotes.

With many thanks and warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 17

Social Research
An International Quarterly of
Political & Social Science
66 West 12 Street 11
New York City
May 27, 1948

Dear Dr. Voegelin:

I regret that the Editorial Board took such a long time to arrive at a decision regarding your article "The Origins of Scientism."

The Board would be prepared to publish your article provided it is made

40. Voegelin, "The Origins of Scientism," *Social Research* 15 (1948): 462–94.

fully intelligible by itself and somewhat shortened (the normal maximum length of our articles is twenty-five typewritten pages).

Quite a few members of the Board felt that your argument is based on assumptions which are not clarified in this particular chapter of your work. This would apply especially to your distinction between "the realm of phenomena" and the "realm of substance," which, while being suggestive, is felt to be rather vague. I personally believe that this criticism, which refers only to this chapter, is well taken.

I venture to attach a copy of the suggestions made by one of the gentlemen who has read your paper. You are, of course, perfectly free as to what use you want to make of these observations. It is conceivable that one or the other of the points made might be of interest to you.

The chief point which you make is, of course, of the greatest importance, but I am not so certain that it suffices as an explanation of what you call "scientism." But this is too long a topic to allow a discussion in an official letter.

With kindest regards.

Sincerely,

Leo Strauss
Associate Editor

ls/dgs

Dr. Eric Voegelin
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, La.

Comments on Voegelin's "The Origins of Scientism"[41]

The author should state at the very outset in unambiguous terms what he considers to be the unwarranted claim of scientism. This might best be done by briefly contrasting scientific problems and methods with philosophical problems and methods. In this context, it should be made unmistakably clear, whether the word "scientism" is meant to apply to all doctrines which are "positivistic" (refuse to admit that there are genuine metaphysical problems), or only to those positivist doctrines which postulate the unity of the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences under the hegemony of physics. (F. A. Hayek in his papers on scientism in

41. Enclosure with Letter 17.

Economica uses the term in the more restricted use;[42] Voegelin seems to use it in the broader sense.) The difference between philosophical and scientific approaches could then be exemplified by an analysis of the nature of space, with Berkeley and Leibniz representing the philosophical approach.

The great influence of the ancient (and particularly of the treatment of the problem of space in Aristotle's *Physics*) on pertinent seventeenth-century thinking could be emphasized. Voegelin's statement that the problem of absolute and relative space begins with Copernicus is untenable.

It should be pointed out that the thesis of absolute space was supposed to be strongly supported by the generally accepted view that the axioms of Euclidean geometry are descriptive of the structure of physical space, and unaffected by the constellations of material things in space.

The size of the paper could be substantially reduced by leaving out or cutting down a number of observations which are not needed for the presentation of the argument, i.e., the discussion of Galileo's trial and of Henry More's influence on Newton.

Some footnotes for the guidance of the readers of *SR* should be added. Not all of them can be expected to be familiar, e.g., with the meaning of Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

Letter 18

June 12, 1943

Dear Dr. Strauss:

I am sorry that only today I can acknowledge your letter of May 27 as well as the return of the manuscript.

I am quite happy that on the whole you seem to consider the problem of some importance. And I shall cut down the article and round it out so that it will be publishable as an independent piece.

With regard to the size, I should say offhand that I can cut off seven pages, which will leave about thirty pages. Whether I can reduce further five to come down to twenty-five pages I do not know, but I shall try. I am doubtful upon this point because due regard to the advice that you attached

42. The articles were published originally by *Economica* between 1942 and 1944 and reprinted in Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955).

to your letter will make a few qualifications and explanations necessary, which will take space.

You have sensed quite rightly that the distinction between substance and phenomena presupposes analyses that are not included in the present manuscript. There is, indeed, in the book a whole extensive chapter on phenomenalism.[43] I mention that because I do not want to create the impression that the present manuscript is intended as an even faintly exhaustive treatment of the problem of scientism. The principal sections that in the book, deal with this problem are the chapters on the Encyclopedists, on Condorcet, and on Comte.[44]

We are leaving tomorrow for Cambridge. And I shall rewrite and send you the manuscript as soon as we get settled there.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

PS. I was agreeably surprised that the political interpretation proper seems to be acceptable to you and your friends. I had expected some resistance against the sections on spiritual eunuchism.

Letter 19

October 11, 1948

Dear Doctor Strauss:

At last I have found time to bring the article on "Origins of Scientism" into shape.

I have followed your suggestions and made certain cuts. In the aggregate, seven and a half pages have been removed. I could not do more without impairing the coherence of the argument.

With my best regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Eric Voegelin

43. This chapter appears in the *History of Political Ideas*.

44. Published in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*.

Letter 20

January 14, 1949

Dear Dr. Strauss,

Your publisher sent me a copy of your new book *On Tyranny*.[45] I take it that it is meant as a gift from you and thank you warmly for sending it.

I immediately read the book and find it to be excellent. It is a model of careful analysis of the inner relations of a work; and the systematic problem you unravel is of greatest importance. I can only heartily congratulate you on the completion of this work.

At the same time as your book arrived, I was requested by Gurian[46] to write a review for the *Review of Politics*.[47] I did that immediately, and I have enclosed a copy of it. I do not yet know if Gurian will bring it out in this form; maybe he will find it too long. But at least you see from it what I have to say in more detail to your problem.

All best wishes for your professorship in Chicago.[48] And again many thanks for the book.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Appendix to Letter 20

Voegelin's Review of Strauss's On Tyranny

The book *On Tyranny* by Professor Strauss has for its nucleus an analysis of the Xenophontic dialogue *Hiero*; here it is a contribution to the history of political thought. In addition, especially in the introductory chapter, it contains a number of reflections on the problem of tyranny in ancient and modern times, on differences between ancient and modern political

45. Strauss, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon's "Hiero,"* Foreword by Alvin Johnson (New York: Political Science Classics, 1948).

46. Waldemar Gurian, professor of political science at Notre Dame University and editor of the *Review of Politics*.

47. Voegelin, review of *On Tyranny*, by Leo Strauss, *Review of Politics* 11 (1949): 241–44.

48. Strauss moved to Chicago in 1949; he retired as Robert M. Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science in 1967.

science, and on the relation between *Hiero* and Machiavelli's *Prince* as points of closest contact between the ancient and modern approaches to the problem of tyranny—thus justifying the more general title which the author has chosen for his book.

An interpretation of the *Hiero* is a very valuable undertaking. The dialogue, though the only work of antiquity dealing specifically with the subject of tyranny, is much neglected, sharing this neglect with the other works of Xenophon in the shadow of the greater Plato. While Professor Strauss's analysis will hardly affect the judgment that Xenophon was not a profound thinker, it certainly will compel a revision of judgment with regard to his psychological subtlety and his skill of composition as an artist. The *Hiero* is a conversation between the tyrant Hiero and the poet Simonides on the relative merits of the tyrannical and private life. As distinguished from the distribution of roles in the Platonic dialogues, the tyrant is charged with the indictment of tyranny, while the sage comforts the unhappy tyrant and suggests means for making his tyranny a beneficent rule and his person beloved by the subjects. Professor Strauss excels in his exposition of the dramatic qualities of the conversation. The interpretation as such, resting on the solid basis of impeccable erudition, is a model of careful analysis.

As for Professor Strauss's reflections of a systematic nature, they range widely, but are formulated so tersely, and sometimes esoterically, that the danger of misunderstanding is great. With all due apologies for mistakes which may arise from this source, I should say that the problem of most interest to the author was that of freedom of intellectual criticism under a tyrannical government. We are living in an age of tyranny; and therefore, what the ancients had to say on the subject is of importance; but perhaps of even more importance is how they managed to say it so frequently without getting killed in the process. The *Hiero* is full of instructive details; and Professor Strauss does not fail to point the lessons. Tyranny is considered, in the Socratic circle, a defective form of government; in the *Hiero*, the sage tenders advice about the practical improvement of this form; he "collaborates" with tyranny. In his careful and interesting exploration of this problem, Professor Strauss sheds light on the relation of the sage to civic freedom as well as on the potential conflict between freedom and virtue in government.

Yet in the exposition we miss a proper valuation of the point that for Xenophon, as well as for Plato, the problem of tyranny had already become one of historical necessity, not merely of theoretical discussion. The

Socratic circle might well define tyranny as a defective form of government; that, however, did not change the fact that the polis democracy had degenerated to the point where "tyranny" became the inevitable alternative to a democracy which had ceased to function effectively. A good many of the enigmas of the *Hiero* may derive from the fact that a new political situation is discussed in terms of "tyranny" because a vocabulary more suitable to the new problems had not yet been developed. Professor Strauss notes that, in the second part of the *Hiero*, the terminology quietly changes. Simonides no longer speaks of the tyrant but uses the term "ruler." This change in terminology seems not a mere matter of persuasive prudence; it seems to indicate the genuine necessity of dropping an inadequate term.

Professor Strauss opposes the *Cyropaedia* as a mirror of the perfect king to the *Hiero* as a mirror of the tyrant that has influenced the Machiavellian *Prince*. The opposition does not seem to me to exhaust the problem. Under another aspect, both *Cyropaedia* and *Hiero* are on the same side; for the very motivation of the *Cyropaedia* is the search for a stable rule that will make an end to the dreamy overturning of democracies and tyrannies in the Hellenic polis; and what makes the many tribes and nations obey Cyrus is not all sweetness and reason but the "fear and terror" which he inspires. Both works fundamentally face the same historical problem of the new rulership; and it is again perhaps only the lack of an adequate vocabulary that makes the two solutions of the perfect king and the improved tyrant look more opposed to each other than they really are.

This suggestion gains in plausibility if we take a closer look at the parallel with Machiavelli's problem, which Professor Strauss stresses. If I understand him rightly, he sees the *tertium comparationis* between *Hiero* and *Prince* in the tendency of both works to obliterate the distinction of king and tyrant. In this tendency of the *Prince* he recognizes its specifically "modern" character, and even one of the "deepest roots of modern political thought"; precisely for the understanding of this aspect of modern political thought, he finds some attention to the *Hiero* "very useful, not to say indispensable." The comparison is decisive for the understanding of both Xenophon and Machiavelli, but it will need some reformulation in detail. It seems insufficient to state that in *Hiero* and *Prince* we have a point of the closest contact between "ancient" and "modern" political thought. The contact certainly is there; but it is due to the fact that both Xenophon and Machiavelli are in the position of "moderns" in their respective civilizations; the parallel between the two thinkers is due to the parallel between

their historical situations. The distinction between king and tyrant is obliterated in the *Prince*, because Machiavelli, like Xenophon, was faced with the problem of a stabilizing and regenerating rulership after the breakdown of constitutional forms in the city-state; it is obliterated because Machiavelli, too, was in search of a type of ruler beyond the distinction of king and tyrant that is politically significant only *before* the final breakdown of the republican constitutional order.

Luckier than Xenophon, however, Machiavelli was able to find a name for the new type of ruler which he envisaged. He called it the *profeta armato*, the prophet in arms; and for his paternity he claimed (besides Romulus, Moses, and Theseus) precisely the Xenophontic Cyrus whom, as the perfect king, Professor Strauss would rather put in opposition to the Hiero. The figure of the Sicilian tyrant would have been too weak to bear the burden of the savior prince that Machiavelli wanted to put on his shoulders; the composite figure of the *profeta armato* resembles rather Plato's royal ruler in the *Statesman* than any of the Xenophontic types. The obliteration of the old distinctions, we should say, is rather due to the attempt to create a new type. Within this new type, however, Machiavelli lets the good royal and bad tyrannical variants reappear; for he distinguishes between the "princes" whose actions are inspired by the *virtù ordinata*, tending toward the necessary public order, and those whose *sceleratezze* are motivated by the lust for personal power. Machiavelli, thus, has actually achieved the theoretical creation of a concept of rulership in the post-constitutional situation; and he has also achieved the theoretical distinction of the good and bad variants within the new type, corresponding to the distinction of king and tyrant in the constitutional situation. Xenophon, on the other hand, has in this respect achieved no more than the shift from the term *tyrannos* in the first part, to the term *archōn* in the second part of the *Hiero*.

It may be worthwhile to recall that the influence of Xenophon on Machiavelli's *Prince* makes itself felt in a roundabout way which Professor Strauss does not mention. Machiavelli's image of the prince is not quite original in its time; it must be seen against the background of the new genus of a "mirror of the prince" that developed in the second half of the fifteenth century in connection with events in the Near East, that is, against the background of the *Vita Tamerlani* as created by Poggio Bracciolini and standardized by Aeneas Silvio. Machiavelli's complete drawing of the savior prince in the *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* is hardly thinkable without the standardized model of the *Life of Timur*. This *Vita* of

the Timur class uses for its pattern—besides the youth of Moses and the youth of Cyrus as reported by Herodotus—the Xenophontic Cyrus, in particular the ruthlessly conquering Cyrus of *Cyropaedia* 1.4–5, who compels obedience by fear and terror. This line of Xenophontic influence is of special import for Professor Strauss's study of the problem of tyranny: by way of the *Vita Tamerlani* there has entered into the classical post-constitutional conqueror and ruler the nonclassical conception of the new ruler as the avenger of the misdeeds of a corrupt people, that is, the idea of the ruler as the *ultor peccatorum*. This new factor, which has amalgamated with the Xenophontic elements, is also to be found in Machiavelli—in the *Castruccio* as well as in the apocalyptic aspects of the *profeta armato* in the *Prince*, in particular in the last chapter. The spiritual, apocalyptic aspect of the new ruler, however, is neither "ancient" nor "modern"; it is Western-Christian as opposed to Hellenic-Pagan. The "modernity" of Machiavelli's prince has a specific tone through the absorption of such medieval-Christian antecedents as the Joachitic *dux*, Dante's *veltro* and the realization of these ideas in the savior-tribunate of Rienzo. "Modern tyranny" must remain unintelligible unless we have proper regard for the fact that it is a phenomenon in Western, not in Hellenic, society and that, consequently, it is burdened with the tradition that leads from medieval and Renaissance Paracletes to the secularized Supermen of the nineteenth century and after. No problem of this kind is to be found in Xenophon, or anywhere else in Hellenic civilization before Alexander, except again in the figuration of the royal ruler in Plato's *Statesman*.

Nevertheless, there is one sign of a specific influence of the *Hiero* on Machiavelli: the point of the *contemptus vulgi*. One of the finest parts of Professor Strauss's analysis concerns the subtle graduation of human ranks in the *Hiero*. The dialogue starts with the question of the relative merits of the life of the tyrant and the life of the private man. Then, in the conversation, emerge the nuances of the "gentleman," the "just man," the "brave man," the "real man," and the "sage." With the elimination of these various types and their possible attitudes toward the government of the tyrant, there remains as the socially relevant type which the tyrant must face in the mass a somewhat nondescript, washed-out creature. This creature can be handled by various enticements and fears, by prizes for good conduct and by persuasion. The tyrant's contempt for the herd, as Professor Strauss points out, is strikingly paralleled in the *Prince*; here, too, the

mass-man is seen as incapable of self-government, and as making the new type of ruler historically necessary.

This book, finally, is a noteworthy contribution to the systematic problems of political theory. Every political scientist who tries to disentangle himself from the contemporary confusion over the problems of tyranny will be much indebted to this study and inevitably use it as a starting point.

The book is preceded by a charming foreword from the pen of Alvin Johnson. The distinguished scholar and educator stresses the affinities between Xenophon and America. Like an American, Xenophon "failed to see the things that aren't there. And, indeed, as a wide-awake young fellow, Xenophon managed to get into the presence of Socrates, but got little that was Socratic out of his encounters." Instead, he was gallant and resourceful. He speculated on true happiness, "but no more than an American did he break his head on it. He wanted pragmatic answers, not nebulous ultimacies."

—Eric Voegelin

Strauss's Response to Voegelin's Review

RESTATEMENT ON XENOPHON'S *HIERO*

A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks, for example, of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are. It is therefore not scientific. Present-day social science finds itself in this condition. If it is true that present-day social science is the inevitable result of modern social science and of modern philosophy, one is forced to think of the restoration of classical social science. Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be enabled and compelled to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear in the guise of dictatorships. This diagnosis can only be the first step toward an exact analysis of present-day tyranny, for present-day tyranny is fundamentally different from the tyranny analyzed by the classics.

But is this not tantamount to admitting that the classics were wholly unfamiliar with tyranny in its contemporary form? Must one not therefore conclude that the classical concept of tyranny is too narrow and hence that

Excerpted from Leo Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*." See note 49 to Letter 21.

the classical frame of reference must be radically modified, i.e., abandoned? In other words, is the attempt to restore classical social science not utopian, since it implies that the classical orientation has not been made obsolete by the triumph of the biblical orientation?

This seems to be the chief objection to which my study of Xenophon's *Hiero* is exposed. At any rate, this is the gist of the only criticisms of my study from which one could learn anything. Those criticisms were written in complete independence of each other, and their authors, Professor Eric Voegelin and M. Alexandre Kojève, have, so to speak, nothing in common. Before discussing their arguments, I must restate my contention.

The fact that there is a fundamental difference between classical tyranny and present-day tyranny, or that the classics did not even dream of present-day tyranny, is not a good or sufficient reason for abandoning the classical frame of reference. For that fact is perfectly compatible with the possibility that present-day tyranny finds its place within the classical framework, i.e., that it cannot be understood adequately except within the classical framework. The difference between present-day tyranny and classical tyranny has its root in the difference between the modern notion of philosophy or science and the classical notion of philosophy or science. Present-day tyranny, in contradistinction to classical tyranny, is based on the unlimited progress in the "conquest of nature" which is made possible by modern science, as well as on the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge. Both possibilities—the possibility of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the possibility of the popularization of philosophy or science—were known to the classics. (Compare Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.15 with Empedocles, fr. III; Plato, *Theaetetus* 180 c 7–d 5.) But the classics rejected them as "unnatural," i.e., as destructive of humanity. They did not dream of present-day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imagination in entirely different directions.

Voegelin, one of the leading contemporary historians of political thought, seems to contend (*The Review of Politics*, 1949, pp. 241–44) that the classical concept of tyranny is too narrow because it does not cover the phenomenon known as Caesarism: when calling a given regime tyrannical, we imply that "constitutional" government is a viable alternative to it; but Caesarism emerges only after "the final breakdown of the republican constitutional order"; hence, Caesarism or "post-constitutional" rule cannot be understood as a subdivision of tyranny in the classical sense of tyranny. There is no reason to quarrel with the view that genuine

Caesarism is not tyranny, but this does not justify the conclusion that Caesarism is incomprehensible on the basis of classical political philosophy: Caesarism is still a subdivision of absolute monarchy as the classics understood it. If in a given situation "the republican constitutional order" has completely broken down, and there is no reasonable prospect of its restoration within all the foreseeable future, the establishment of permanent absolute rule cannot, as such, be justly blamed; therefore, it is fundamentally different from the establishment of tyranny. Just blame could attach only to the manner in which that permanent absolute rule that is truly necessary is established and exercised; as Voegelin emphasizes, there are tyrannical as well as royal Caesars. One has only to read Coluccio Salutati's defense of Caesar against the charge that he was a tyrant—a defense which in all essential points is conceived in the spirit of the classics—in order to see that the distinction between Caesarism and tyranny fits perfectly into the classical framework.

But the phenomenon of Caesarism is one thing, the current concept of Caesarism is another. The current concept of Caesarism is certainly incompatible with classical principles. The question thus arises whether the current concept or the classical concept is more nearly adequate. More particularly, the question concerns the validity of the two implications of the current concept which Voegelin seems to regard as indispensable, and which originated in nineteenth-century historicism. In the first place, he seems to believe that the difference between "the constitutional situation" and "the post-constitutional situation" is more fundamental than the difference between the good king or the good Caesar on the one hand and the bad king or the bad Caesar on the other. But is not the difference between good and bad the most fundamental of all practical or political distinctions? Secondly, Voegelin seems to believe that "post-constitutional" rule is not per se inferior to "constitutional" rule. But is not "post-constitutional" rule justified by necessity or, as Voegelin says, by "historical necessity"? And is not the necessary essentially inferior to the noble or to what is choiceworthy for its own sake? Necessity excuses: what is justified by necessity is in need of excuse. The Caesar, as Voegelin conceives of him, is "the avenger of the misdeeds of a corrupt people." Caesarism is then essentially related to a corrupt people, to a low level of political life, to a decline of society. It presupposes the decline, if not the extinction, of civic virtue or of public spirit, and it necessarily perpetuates that condition. Caesarism belongs to a degraded society, and it thrives on its degradation. Caesarism is just, whereas tyranny is unjust. But Caesarism is just in the way in which

deserved punishment is just. It is as little choiceworthy for its own sake as is deserved punishment. Cato refused to see what his time demanded because he saw too clearly the degraded character of what his time demanded. It is much more important to realize the low level of Caesarism (for, to repeat, Caesarism cannot be divorced from the society which deserves Caesarism) than to realize that under certain conditions Caesarism is necessary and hence legitimate.

While the classics were perfectly capable of doing justice to the merits of Caesarism, they were not particularly concerned with elaborating a doctrine of Caesarism. Since they were primarily concerned with the best regime, they paid less attention to "post-constitutional" rule, or to late kingship, than to "pre-constitutional" rule, or to early kingship: rustic simplicity is a better soil for the good life than is sophisticated rottenness. But there was another reason which induced the classics to be almost silent about "post-constitutional" rule. To stress the fact that it is just to replace constitutional rule by absolute rule, if the common good requires that change, means to cast a doubt on the absolute sanctity of the established constitutional order. It means encouraging dangerous men to confuse the issue by bringing about a state of affairs in which the common good requires the establishment of their absolute rule. The true doctrine of the legitimacy of Caesarism is a dangerous doctrine. The true distinction between Caesarism and tyranny is too subtle for ordinary political use. It is better for the people to remain ignorant of that distinction and to regard the potential Caesar as a potential tyrant. No harm can come from this theoretical error which becomes a practical truth if the people have the mettle to act upon it. No harm can come from the political identification of Caesarism and tyranny: Caesars can take care of themselves.

The classics could easily have elaborated a doctrine of Caesarism or of late kingship if they had wanted, but they did not want to do it. Voegelin however contends that they were forced by their historical situation to grope for a doctrine of Caesarism, and that they failed to discover it. He tries to substantiate his contention by referring to Xenophon and to Plato. As for Plato, Voegelin was forced by considerations of space to limit himself to a summary reference to the royal ruler in the *Statesman*. As for Xenophon, he rightly asserts that it is not sufficient to oppose "the *Cyropaedia* as a mirror of the perfect king to the *Hiero* as a mirror of the tyrant," since the perfect king Cyrus and the improved tyrant who is described by Simonides "look much more opposed to each other than they really are." He explains this fact by suggesting that "both works fundamen-

tally face the same historical problem of the new [sc., post-constitutional] rulership," and that one cannot solve this problem except by obliterating at the first stage, the distinction between king and tyrant. To justify this explanation he contends that "the very motivation of the *Cyropaedia* is the search for a stable rule that will make an end to the dreary overturning of democracies and tyrannies in the Hellenic polis." This contention is not supported by what Xenophon says or indicates in regard to the intention of the *Cyropaedia*. Its explicit intention is to make intelligible Cyrus's astonishing success in solving the problem of ruling human beings. Xenophon conceives of this problem as one that is coeval with man. Like Plato in the *Statesman*, he does not make the slightest reference to the particular "historical" problem of stable rule in "the post-constitutional situation." In particular, he does not refer to "the dreary overturning of democracies and tyrannies in the Hellenic polis": he speaks of the frequent overturning of democracies, monarchies, and oligarchies and of the essential instability of all tyrannies. As for the implicit intention of the *Cyropaedia*, it is partly revealed by the remark, toward the end of the work, that "after Cyrus died, his sons immediately quarreled, cities and nations immediately revolted, and all things turned to the worse." If Xenophon was not a fool, he did not intend to present Cyrus's regime as a model. He knew too well that the good order of society requires stability and continuity. (Compare the opening of the *Cyropaedia* with the parallel in the *Agesilaus* 1.4.) He rather used Cyrus's meteoric success and the way in which it was brought about as an example for making intelligible the nature of political things. The work which describes Cyrus's whole life is entitled *The Education of Cyrus*: the education of Cyrus is the clue to his whole life, to his astonishing success, and hence to Xenophon's intention. A very rough sketch must here suffice. Xenophon's Cyrus was the son of the king of Persia, and until he was about twelve years old he was educated according to the laws of the Persians. The laws and polity of Xenophon's Persians, however, are an improved version of the laws and polity of the Spartans. The Persia in which Cyrus was raised was an aristocracy superior to Sparta. The political activity of Cyrus—his extraordinary success—consisted in transforming a stable and healthy aristocracy into an unstable "Oriental despotism" whose rottenness showed itself at the latest immediately after his death. The first step in this transformation was a speech which Cyrus addressed to the Persian nobles and in which he convinced them that they ought to deviate from the habit of their ancestors by practicing virtue no longer for its own sake, but for the sake of its rewards. The destruction of

aristocracy begins, as one would expect, with corruption of its principle. (*Cyropaedia* 1.5.5–14; compare Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1248 b 38ff., where the view of virtue which Xenophon's Cyrus instills into the minds of the Persian gentlemen is described as the Spartan view.) The quick success of Cyrus's first action forces the reader to wonder whether the Persian aristocracy was a genuine aristocracy, or, more precisely, whether the gentleman in the political or social sense is a true gentleman. This question is identical with the question which Plato answers explicitly in the negative in his story of Er. Socrates says outright that a man who has lived in his former life in a well-ordered regime, participating in virtue by habit and without philosophy, will choose for his next life "the greatest tyranny," for "mostly people make their choice according to the habits of their former life" (*Republic* 619 b 6-620 a 3). There is no adequate solution to the problem of virtue or happiness on the political or social plane. Still, while aristocracy is always on the verge of declining into oligarchy or something worse, it is the best possible political solution of the human problem. It must here suffice to note that Cyrus's second step is the democratization of the army, and that the end of the process is a regime that might seem barely distinguishable from the least intolerable form of tyranny. But one must not overlook the essential difference between Cyrus's rule and tyranny, a distinction that is never obliterated. Cyrus is and remains a legitimate ruler. He is born as a legitimate heir to the reigning king, a scion of an old royal house. He becomes the king of other nations through inheritance or marriage and through just conquest, for he enlarges the boundaries of Persia in the Roman manner: by defending the allies of Persia. The difference between Cyrus and a Hiero educated by Simonides is comparable to the difference between William III and Oliver Cromwell. A cursory comparison of the history of England with the history of certain other European nations suffices to show that this difference is not unimportant to the well-being of peoples. Xenophon did not even attempt to obliterate the distinction between the best tyrant and the king, because he appreciated too well the charms, nay, the blessings, of legitimacy. He expressed this appreciation by subscribing to the maxim (which must be reasonably understood and applied) that the just is identical with the legal.

Voegelin might reply that what is decisive is not Xenophon's conscious intention, stated or implied, but the historical meaning of his work, the historical meaning of a work being determined by the historical situation as distinguished from the conscious intention of the author. Yet opposing the historical meaning of Xenophon's work to his conscious intention implies

that we are better judges of the situation in which Xenophon thought than Xenophon himself was. But we cannot be better judges of that situation if we do not have a clearer grasp than he had of the principles in whose light historical situations reveal their meaning. After the experience of our generation, the burden of proof would seem to rest on those who assert rather than on those who deny that we have progressed beyond the classics. And even if it were true that we could understand the classics better than they understood themselves, we would become certain of our superiority only after understanding them exactly as they understood themselves. Otherwise we might mistake our superiority to our notion of the classics for superiority to the classics.

According to Voegelin, it was Machiavelli, as distinguished from the classics, who "achieved the theoretical creation of a concept of rulership in the post-constitutional situation," and this achievement was due to the influence on Machiavelli of the biblical tradition. He refers especially to Machiavelli's remark about the "armed prophets" (*Prince* VI). The difficulty to which Voegelin's contention is exposed is indicated by these two facts: he speaks on the one hand of "the apocalyptic [hence thoroughly nonclassical] aspects of the 'armed prophet' in the *Prince*," whereas on the other hand he says that Machiavelli claimed "for [the] paternity" of the "armed prophet" "besides Romulus, Moses, and Theseus, precisely the Xenophontic Cyrus." This amounts to an admission that certainly Machiavelli himself was not aware of any nonclassical implication of his notion of "armed prophets." There is nothing unclassical about Romulus, Theseus, and Xenophon's Cyrus. It is true that Machiavelli adds Moses; but, after having made his bow to the biblical interpretation of Moses, he speaks of Moses in exactly the same manner in which every classical political philosopher would have spoken of him; Moses was one of the greatest legislators or founders (*fondatori*: *Discorsi* I.9) who ever lived. When reading Voegelin's statement on this subject, one receives the impression that in speaking of armed prophets, Machiavelli put the emphasis on "prophets" as distinguished from nonprophetic rulers like Cyrus, for example. But Machiavelli puts the emphasis not on "prophets," but on "armed." He opposes the armed prophets, among whom he counts Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, as well as Moses, to unarmed prophets like Savonarola. He states the lesson which he intends to convey with remarkable candor: "all armed prophets succeed and the unarmed ones come to ruin." It is difficult to believe that in writing this sentence Machiavelli should have been completely oblivious of the most famous of all unarmed prophets. One certainly cannot understand Machiavelli's remark on the "unarmed proph-

ets" without taking into consideration what he says about the "unarmed heaven" and "the effeminacy of the world" which, according to him, are due to Christianity (*Discorsi* II.2 and III.1). The tradition which Machiavelli continues, while radically modifying it, is not, as Voegelin suggests, that represented by Joachim of Floris, for example, but the one which we still call, with pardonable ignorance, the Averroistic tradition. Machiavelli declares that Savonarola, that unarmed prophet, was right in saying that the ruin of Italy was caused by "our sins," "but our sins were not what he believed they were," namely, religious sins, "but those which I have narrated," namely, political or military sins (*Prince* XII). In the same vein Maimonides declares that the ruin of the Jewish kingdom was caused by the "sins of our fathers," namely, by their idolatry; but idolatry worked its effect in a perfectly natural manner: it led to astrology and thus induced the Jewish people to devote themselves to astrology instead of to the practice of the arts of war and the conquest of countries. But apart from all this, Voegelin does not give any indication of what the armed prophets have to do with "the post-constitutional situation." Certainly Romulus, Theseus, and Moses were "pre-constitutional" rulers. Voegelin also refers to "Machiavelli's complete drawing of the savior prince in the *Vita di Castruccio Castracani*" which, he says, "is hardly thinkable without the standardized model of the *Life of Timur*." Apart from the fact that Voegelin has failed to show any connection between the *Castruccio* and the *Life of Timur* and between the *Life of Timur* and the biblical tradition, the *Castruccio* is perhaps the most impressive document of Machiavelli's longing for classical *virtù* as distinguished from, and opposed to, biblical righteousness. Castruccio, that idealized condottiere who preferred in so single-minded a manner the life of the soldier to the life of the priest, is compared by Machiavelli himself to Philip of Macedon and to Scipio of Rome.

Machiavelli's longing for classical *virtù* is only the reverse side of his rejection of classical political philosophy. He rejects classical political philosophy because of its orientation by the perfection of the nature of man. The abandonment of the contemplative ideal leads to a radical change in the character of wisdom: Machiavellian wisdom has no necessary connection with moderation. Machiavelli separates wisdom from moderation. The ultimate reason why the *Hiero* comes so close to the *Prince* is that in the *Hiero* Xenophon experiments with a type of wisdom which comes relatively close to a wisdom divorced from moderation: Simonides seems to have an inordinate desire for the pleasures of the table. It is impossible to say how far the epoch-making change that was effected by Machiavelli is

due to the indirect influence of the biblical tradition, before that change has been fully understood in itself.

The peculiar character of the *Hiero* does not disclose itself to cursory reading. It will not disclose itself to the tenth reading, however painstaking, if the reading is not productive of a change of orientation. This change was much easier to achieve for the eighteenth-century reader than for the reader in our century who has been brought up on the brutal and sentimental literature of the last five generations. We are in need of a second education in order to accustom our eyes to the noble reserve and the quiet grandeur of the classics. Xenophon, as it were, limited himself to cultivating exclusively that character of classical writing which is wholly foreign to the modern reader. No wonder that he is today despised or ignored. An unknown ancient critic, who must have been a man of uncommon discernment, called him most bashful. Those modern readers who are so fortunate as to have a natural preference for Jane Austen rather than for Dostoievski, in particular, have an easier access to Xenophon than others might have; to understand Xenophon, they have only to combine the love of philosophy with their natural preference. In the words of Xenophon, "it is both noble and just, and pious and more pleasant to remember the good things rather than the bad ones." In the *Hiero*, Xenophon experimented with the pleasure that comes from remembering bad things, with a pleasure that admittedly is of doubtful morality and piety.

Letter 21

3202 Oxford Ave., New York 63
21.1.49

Dear Mr. Voegelin,

I received your very amiable letter and sympathetic review, just in the middle of decamping and departing. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you. At this point, it interests me merely if there is at least one person who knows these ideas from a reading of the publication and not only from statements by word of mouth and who brings, against these ideas, understanding and a certain sympathy. I was already quite prepared to be hushed up or to be decried as not being a "liberal." In response to your pertinent critique, I cannot say anything, without more careful consideration than is at the moment possible.

Your critique could be interpreted as a supplement to my publication: I do not deny, but rather assume, that there is a fundamental difference between Machiavelli and Xenophon. You sketch out the way this difference should be understood *in concreto*. But you are right: my unexplained thoughts on this issue move in another direction from yours. Maybe I will argue this out with you in print.[49]

Letter 22

March 12, 1949

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your article on "Political Philosophy and History."[50] It is a very fine, clean work; I have the impression that we are in very much greater agreement in the direction of our work than I first supposed. Your main thesis—based on Hegel—that historical reflection is a peculiar requirement of modern philosophy seems completely right to me; and I view this motive also as the *raison d'etre* of my own historical studies. As I have only engaged myself with these questions in English, allow me my English formulation of the problem: To restore the experiences that have led to the creation of certain concepts and symbols; or: Symbols have become opaque; they must be made luminous again by penetrating to the experiences they express.—Very fine too is your critique of the attitude that would understand the thinker better than he would himself; and your insistence that the purpose of historical analysis is the production of meaning, as it was intended by the author.

I assume that this article is a type of advance notice of work, in which

49. In 1954 a French version of *On Tyranny* was published, *De le Tyrannie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). It contained a long review by Alexandre Kojève, "Tyrannie et sagesse," first published as "L'Action politique des philosophes," *Critique* 41–42 (1950): 46–55, 138–55; Strauss added a "mise au point" that responded briefly to Voegelin and at greater length to Kojève. The French reply by Strauss was in turn republished in English as "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," in *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 95–133. The entire Strauss-Kojève debate has recently been reedited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth, *On Tyranny* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

50. Strauss, "Political Philosophy and History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10 (1949): 30–50.

you set out the problem; and I am already very curious to see the further studies.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 23

17.3.49

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I wanted to thank you warmly for your friendly and encouraging lines. It is very fine that you maintain the customs descended from another world, the Old World. Even more pleasing to me is the agreement in our intentions expressed by you, that so long as we have to combat the presently reigning idiocy, [that shared objective] is of greater significance than the differences, which I also would not wish to deny. Insofar as so slow a writer as I could take up something like this, I plan to say something, after its appearance, about your three-volume work, about which I have heard much: in case this occurs, I will specify in detail my standpoint as opposed to yours.

Your surmise regarding my article "Political Philosophy and History" is right: the article is to be thought of as one of the introductory chapters of a publication on classic principles of politics. But heaven only knows if I will manage with this publication: on the decisive questions, there are no preliminary studies, so that one would have to first lay the groundwork through a series of specialized investigations. At the moment I am studying Lucretius.[51] I have the desire to write freely and frankly on the meaning of his poem, that is, without footnotes, assuming that there is some prospect of publishing an essay of this sort. As far as Lucretius is concerned, the classical philologists are again remarkably blind.

With best wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

51. Strauss later published "A Note on Lucretius," in *Natur und Geschichte: Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967), 322–32, and an expanded version, "Notes on Lucretius," in Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 76–139.

Letter 24

March 22, 1949

Dear Mr. Strauss,

The way you fling your productions out—a fact that contradicts the claim in your friendly lines that you are a slow writer. Many thanks for the Spinoza study.[52] It came just at the right time—as, it seems, does everything that comes from you—in that I frequently consider the esoteric in Spinoza and the question of what he could actually mean. And so often an incidental comment was very illuminating for me: from some of your citations emerges the insight that Spinoza saw Christianity very precisely as a Lutheran-Calvinist might. Quite evidently he understands the problem of justification in the sense of the *sola fide* principle; whereas the Thomist problem of *amicitia* in faith is evidently unknown to him. Now I also understand better how Spinoza comes to his own religious attitude of *acquiescentia*, an attitude to which one can come from Lutheranism but hardly from classical Catholicism. This appears to me to be not insignificant for an understanding of Spinoza.

What you write about the plan for Lucretius fills me with mixed feelings. If you are only planning to write on Lucretius, this would certainly be welcome; if, however, this plan might become a prestudy to a systematic text of politics, and precisely through this a reason for its delay, it would be a shame. Lucretius is fine, but I would prefer your systematic politics. My encounters with Lucretius are unfortunately only occasional. I never really studied him, but rather always sniffed around at his work, in particular with regard to Santayana and Valéry; this little, however, lets me regret not knowing more. With Santayana and Valéry I have the impression that their Lucretianism is caused by what I would call spiritual fatigue. The inclination to let oneself drop into a depersonalized nature arises from a pseudo-aesthetic weakness of spirit, in particular in Valéry's moving *Cimetière Marin*. I was never quite clear if Lucretius's materialism might have itself a similar cause in the author's personality. I am anxious to hear something from you about it.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

52. Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 17 (1948): 69–131. Reprinted in Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952).

Letter 25

April 15, 1949

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Your letter of March 22 remained unanswered for so long because in the meantime my first quarter in Chicago began and I was rather preoccupied with it. Yesterday I received a copy of the *Review of Politics* with your review of my work.[53] It pleased me greatly to see that it was printed *in toto* after all. Your review, with a single exception, will be and remain the only one that contributes to the discussion. The exception is a review promised by Alexander Kojève (the author of *Introduction à l'étude de Hegel*, an exceptional work [Gallimard, 1947])[54] in the journal *Critique*.[55] Kojève depicts himself as a Stalinist, but would be immediately shot in the USSR. As soon as Kojève's review appears, I intend to write a critique of both of your critiques. Gurian, who visited me two days ago, will leave me space in the *Review of Politics*.[56] Because I would like to do this, I will save my ammunition. I am doing this also since I want to think over your objections.

Regarding Spinoza, I attempted in my German work on Spinoza (1930) to define more exactly the connection with Calvinism (with Luther, in my opinion, there is no connection at all).[57] I believe now, that then I fell too much into the trap of Spinoza's accommodations. His intertheological preferences are essentially of a tactical nature except for the general one, that he prefers theological rationalism *qua* rationalism over every fideism. For me personally, the most important thing in the essay that you have read is that I succeeded in interpreting "*ad captum vulgi*" authentically. "Sometime" I will point out the coherence of Spinoza's moral philosophy: it is perhaps the most interesting example of an ethics based on modern natural science (in the sense of a modernity "more advanced" than the Hobbesian one).

53. See Letter 20.

54. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. R. Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); trans. James H. Nichols, ed. A. Bloom, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

55. See Letter 21, note.

56. Strauss's reply was not published in the *Review of Politics*; see Letter 21, note.

57. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft: Untersuchungen zu Spinozas theologisch-Politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akadamie Verlag, 1930); trans. E. M. Sinclair, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1965).

Unfortunately, because the semester began, I had to leave Lucretius to one side in order to turn to the Lucretian-grounded Rousseau, the *Discours sur l'origine d'Inégalité*. I hope that this time I will cope with this political writing of J. J. and can in the fall submit an essay about it (a continuation of the essay in *Social Research*).[58] This work contains in germ all that comes later (for example Kant, Marx . . .). I do not yet know if it will be possible for me to point out everything that is in it.

I want to say only this about Lucretius today: his poem is the purest and most glorious expression of the attitude that elicits consolation from the utterly hopeless truth, on the basis of its being only the truth—there is no idea of the use of the hopeless, godless truth for some social purpose, as is almost always the case with other fashions or trends; nor is there any aestheticism or sentimentality. I do not believe that people like Santayana or Valéry can understand Lucretius. The next approximation in our world is the scientifically slanted aspect of Nietzsche.—As for Lucretius's "personality"? I do not believe it matters. Nor does his Romanness: his poem tries precisely *to be free from* "Romanness" (among other things): *primum Graius homo*—this means *not* the Romans.

Hope to hear from you soon. With warm wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 26

17.12.49

My Dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your analysis of the *Gorgias*, which I read with great interest.[59] Your position has become significantly clearer to me, and thus also the point at which I do not quite understand you. We are quite in agreement that in the dialogues *nostra res agitur*, [and] that it is therefore possible in particular to say that Plato's critique of the sophists is a critique of "intellectuals." The question is only whether you first of all interpret in the obvious way *nostra res* and therefore [believe] the reason for the reprehensibleness of the

58. See Letter 16.

59. Voegelin, "The Philosophy of Existence: Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Review of Politics* 11 (1949): 477–98.

intellectuals is identical to the Platonic one. The employment of the expression "existential" reveals the difficulty. "Existential" is opposed to the "objective," "theoretical," and thus betrays its anti-Platonic origin. The man who has thought through most clearly the problem of "existence"—Heidegger—therefore made Plato especially responsible for the actual "neglect." Kierkegaard's resistance to Socrates—the appeal to Socrates against Hegel is after all only provisional—expresses the same thought. In his critique of Plato, Heidegger tries to find the way by rejecting philosophy and metaphysics *as such*. *If* one wants to use the Kierkegaardian expression, one has to say that for Socrates-Plato, "existential" and "theoretical" are the same: insofar as I am serious and there are questions, I look for *the* "objective" truth. The sophist is a man to whom the truth does not matter—but in this sense all men except for the *gnēsios philosophounte* are sophists, especially the *polis* as *polis* (and not only the decadent ones). The passion for *knowledge* that moves the Platonic dialogue, this highest *mania*, cannot be understood within Kierkegaard's concept of "existence," and [the attempt to do so] must be discarded as a radical illusion. This *mania*, from which Faust himself turns away, [is] in opposition to the creature in paradise, on the Isles of the Blessed, or to the painstaking searches of Goethe himself.

The question Plato *or* existentialism is today the ontological question—about "intellectuals" we (you and I) do not need to waste words, unless it were about how they finally have to be interpreted, namely, within Platonic or existentialist philosophy; for this reason, I permit myself these brief remarks.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 27

January 2, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter of 17.XII. I believe I owe you a few lines of explanation.

You are, of course, completely right to become indignant over existentialist philosophy and to ask what got into me. Let me then assure you that the misleading title of the article does not stem from me. I had titled it simply "Plato's Gorgias." Gurian added on "Philosophy of Existence" without asking me; I was embarrassingly surprised when I saw the journal.

Fortunately there are only a few readers, such as you, who would notice the scandal; and so I let it go. I swear that I am not straying on existentialist paths; we are in agreement also on the question of ontology.

Why and in what sense I use the term "existential" in the text of the article should be explained. Terminologically, the case is easy: I know no better expression; if I find one, I would be gladly prepared to use it; and if you could give me ideas I would be very grateful. It has to do then with the problem itself. I use the term "existential" in a sense that is very similar to that of Maritain in his *Court traité de l'existence*, which I just bought in New York and read in part on the trip.[60] The truth of ontology (including in particular philosophical anthropology) is not a datum that can be recognized by anyone at any time. Ontological knowledge emerges in the process of history and biographically in the process of the individual person's life under certain conditions of education, social context, personal inclination, and spiritual conditioning. *Epistēmē* is not just a function of understanding, it is also in the Aristotelian sense, a dianoetic *aretē*. For this *non*cognitive aspect of *epistēmē* I use the term "existential."

In a history of ideas I must use this term quite often. A history of ideas should not be a doxographic report, or a history of dogmas in the classical sense, but rather a history of existential transformations in which the "truth" comes to sight, is obscured, is lost, and is again recovered. A history of political ideas, in particular, should investigate the process in which "truth" becomes socially effective or is hindered in such effectiveness. You see, it does not have to do with a negation or relativization of ontology, but rather with the correlation between perception in the cognitive and existential sense; this correlation is for me the theme of "history." Existential special themes would be: theogony, the history of myth and revelation; destruction of the knowledge of truth through the *pleonexia* of intellectuals; the effectiveness of authority through existential readiness to reproduce the known truth imaginatively; the destruction of authority through the enclosing passion of self-assertion, etc.

These suggestions are brief; but they show what is at stake. I find, as said, no better term than "existential"; but I am at all times ready for a reform in terminology, if I find a better one.

With all best wishes for New Year,

Eric Voegelin

60. Jacques Maritain, *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, trans. L. Galantière and G. B. Phélan as *Existence and the Existent*, new ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1964).

Letter 28

14.3.50

My Dear Mr. Voegelin,

Please excuse my long silence, but since I received your letter of January 2 I have been in such a whirl.

We are arguing as to whether, if one rejects existentialist philosophy, one can employ the expression "existential" without creating confusion. You admit the difficulty, but see no alternative. What is the problem? There are truths, you say, that cannot be seen by everyone at all times, the recognition of which therefore is bound to certain extratheoretical presuppositions, and thus are "existentially" conditioned. Therein lies an ambivalence: even Aristotle would have admitted that his conception of the whole was not factually possible at all times—it required leisure, that is to say, free communities within which there was the possibility for the unfolding of a higher humanity, and especially it required the continuity of a series of thinkers dedicated to the search for the truth of the whole. But: here "history" is no more than *condition* for the recognition of truth—"history" is not the source of truth. You say: the history of ideas is the "history of the existential transformations in which the 'truth' comes to view, is obscured, is lost, and then again won." Why do you place "truth" in quotation marks? Is truth only so-called truth, the illusion of the respective period? Or if there is *the* truth, which indeed under unfavorable circumstances, or deliberately, is obscured and then also not again won, this truth is itself and principally not "existentially" conditioned.

The concept "existential" requires a radical critique of the *vita contemplativa*, such that at the base of this critique one can only reject, but not understand, Plato. To my mind it will not do to identify Plato's critique of sophistry as a topic with the existentialist critique of *theoria*: the sophists (=intellectuals) were quite clearly not theoretical characters. Indeed, the *vita contemplativa* requires a turning around of the whole soul, but that does not mean that one can understand the *vita contemplativa* adequately in respect of its effects on the (if you forgive the expression) nontheoretical part of the soul.

The closest classical equivalent of "existential" is "practical," insofar as one understands "practical" in contradistinction to "theoretical." Existentialist philosophy will perhaps appear at some time in the future as the paradoxical effort to lead the thought of the praxis of the practical to its, in my mind, absurd last consequences. Under these conditions praxis ceases indeed to be

actually praxis and transforms itself into "existence." If I am not totally mistaken, the root of all modern darkness from the seventeenth century on is the obscuring of the difference between theory and praxis, an obscuring that first leads to a reduction of praxis to theory (this is the meaning of so-called rationalism) and then, in retaliation, to the rejection of theory in the name of a praxis that is no longer intelligible as praxis.

In short, I do not believe that one can succeed with the terminology today at one's disposal (as the classic terminology is for the present completely unintelligible). That this is no mere "semantic" problem, I hardly need to say to you.

I warmly reciprocate your wishes for the New Year—please accept them despite the terrible delay.

Cordially yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 29

10.4.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

You have misunderstood me, as you could not decipher my disgraceful handwriting.[61] I spoke not of "extrahuman" but rather of "extratheoretical" *presupposition*. The question is whether there is a pure grasp of truth as an *essential human possibility*, quite regardless of what the conditions and *actualization* of this possibility are, or whether there is *not* such a grasp as an essential possibility. When you say "only at such and such a time did that order of the soul emerge," you leave open the question whether this order of the soul is the natural telos of Man or a "coincidence"; that it also *could not* have emerged, does that not deprive it of the status of a telos? However that may be, it seems to me, nonetheless, that we are in more fundamental agreement than I believed.

May I ask you to let me know sometime what you think of Mr. Popper.[62] He gave a lecture here, on the task of social philosophy, that was beneath

61. Letter missing (Voegelin to Strauss).

62. Karl Popper, author of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and several other works of an analytical nature.

contempt: it was the most washed-out, lifeless positivism trying to whistle in the dark, linked to a complete inability to think "rationally," although it passed itself off as "rationalism"—it was very bad. I cannot imagine that such a man ever wrote something that was worthwhile reading, and yet it appears to be a professional duty to become familiar with his productions. Could you say something to me about that—if you wish, I will keep it to myself.

Warmest greetings,

Leo Strauss

Letter 30

April 18, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

The opportunity to speak a few deeply felt words about Karl Popper to a kindred soul is too golden to endure a long delay. This Popper has been for years, not exactly a stone against which one stumbles, but a troublesome pebble that I must continually nudge from the path, in that he is constantly pushed upon me by people who insist that his work on the "open society and its enemies" is one of the social science masterpieces of our times. This insistence persuaded me to read the work even though I would otherwise not have touched it. You are quite right to say that it is a vocational duty to make ourselves familiar with the ideas of such a work when they lie in our field; I would hold out against this duty the other vocational duty, not to write and to publish such a work. In that Popper violated this elementary vocational duty and stole several hours of my lifetime, which I devoted in fulfilling my vocational duty, I feel completely justified in saying without reservation that this book is impudent, dilettantish crap. Every single sentence is a scandal, but it is still possible to lift out a few main annoyances.

1. The expressions "closed [society]" and "open society" are taken from Bergson's *Deux Sources*.[63] Without explaining the difficulties that induced

63. Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion*, trans. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Bereton as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1935).

Bergson to create these concepts, Popper takes the terms because they sound good to him; [he] comments in passing that in Bergson they had a "religious" meaning, but that he will use the concept of the open society closer to Graham Wallas's "great society" or to that of Walter Lippmann. Perhaps I am oversensitive about such things, but I do not believe that respectable philosophers such as Bergson develop their concepts for the sole purpose that the coffeehouse scum might have something to botch. There also arises the relevant problem: if Bergson's theory of open society is philosophically and historically tenable (which I in fact believe), then Popper's idea of the open society is ideological rubbish. For this reason alone, he should have discussed the problem with all possible care.

2. The impertinent disregard for the achievements in his particular problem area, which makes itself evident with respect to Bergson, runs through the whole work. When one reads the deliberations on Plato or Hegel, one has the impression that Popper is quite unfamiliar with the literature on the subject—even though he occasionally cites an author. In some cases, as for example Hegel, I would believe that he has never seen a work like Rosenzweig's *Hegel and the State*.[64] In other cases, where he cites works without appearing to have perceived their contents, another factor is added:

3. Popper is philosophically so uncultured, so fully a primitive ideological brawler, that he is not able even approximately to reproduce correctly the contents of one page of Plato. Reading is of no use to him; he is too lacking in knowledge to understand what the author says. Through this emerge terrible things, as when he translates Hegel's "Germanic world" as "German world" and draws conclusions from this mistranslation regarding Hegel's German nationalist propaganda.

4. Popper engages in no textual analysis from which can be seen the author's intention; instead he carries the modern ideological clichés directly to the text, assuming that the text will deliver results in the sense of the clichés. It will be a special pleasure for you to hear that, for example, Plato experienced an evolution—from an early "humanitarian" period still recognizable in the *Gorgias*, to something else (I can't recall any more if "reactionary" or "authoritarian") in the *Republic*.

Briefly and in sum: Popper's book is a scandal without extenuating

64. Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat* (Berlin: Oldenburg, 1920).

circumstances; in its intellectual attitude it is the typical product of a failed intellectual; spiritually one would have to use expressions like rascally, impertinent, loutish; in terms of technical competence, as a piece in the history of thought, it is dilettantish, and as a result is worthless.

It would not be suitable to show this letter to the unqualified. Where it concerns its factual contents, I would see it as a violation of the vocational duty you identified, to support this scandal through silence.

Eric Voegelin

Letter 31

8.8.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I have never thanked you for your interesting letter dated 18.4. In confidence I would like to tell you that I showed your letter to my friend Kurt Riezler,[65] who was thereby encouraged to throw his not inconsiderable influence into the balance against Popper's probable appointment here. You thereby helped to prevent a scandal.

Today I write to you for the following reason. At the beginning of 1951, at Gallimard's wish, a French translation of my *Hiero* book is to appear in the following form:[66] 1) French translation of the *Hiero*; 2) my text omitting nearly all notes; 3) a sixty-page long critique of my writing titled "La tyrannie et la sagesse," written by Alexander Kojève, author of *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*,[67] which is in every detail an outstanding interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; 4) a "Restatement" from me, which I am just now writing. It seems important to me to begin the discussion with a response to your review. Because the critique of your views forms an integral part of the whole "Restatement," I am not sticking strictly to what you expressly said: I must come to terms with your unstated premises, which in part I know from your other publications, and in part presume. It occurred to me that you might wish to riposte. Unfortunately

65. See Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), ch. 10.

66. See above, Letters 21, 25.

67. See above, Letter 25.

this is not possible in the French publication. But perhaps one could persuade Gurian to print the English original of my afterword together with your riposte in the *Review of Politics*, after the French publication has appeared. Please let me know what you think of this idea.[68]

Warmest greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 32

August 21, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter of August 8. I returned only yesterday from a lengthy trip—as explanation as to why I answer your queries only today.

Let me say above all how much it pleases me that your *Hiero* found attention in France—one of the few good things that has been written today has not become lost. If I have understood your letter properly (I still have occasionally a little difficulty deciphering your handwriting—but it becomes better with every letter I receive from you)—if I understand you properly, then, you will add a "Restatement" to the French edition, in which I might at last clearly find out what the unstated presuppositions of my work are. Do not take this sentence, please, as ironic—I am very concerned myself at the moment with further explications on precisely these presuppositions, and I really hope for some help from your response. Thus far I am then very satisfied with your proposal. With regard to the further possibility of publishing your "Restatement" in English, accompanied by some of my remarks in the *Review of Politics*, you will find me, with the greatest pleasure, willing—if Gurian is interested.

Since the French edition will appear at the beginning of 1951, and the English publication will only take place later, we will have the opportunity to discuss at length these and other things, when I come to Chicago at the

68. This proposal by Strauss was not acted upon by Gurian.

end of January (to the Walgreen Lectures).[69] I am already looking forward to the opportunity of seeing you at some length.

Enclosed, a study on Marx;[70] one or another point may interest you.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 33

25.8.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your Marx essay, which I read with the greatest interest and with hearty agreement. In particular I am in total agreement with what you say regarding "Interpreting the world or changing it": that is, in fact, the root of the evil.[71] You are also completely right when you note the necessity of the *positive* image of the man of the future—this travesty as *homo universalis*, every oaf a Ph.D. I have doubt only with reference to p. 386: "M. was perfectly aware of the connection between his own thought and Genevan Protestantism." He believed in this connection, as did Hegel himself. But is it not, as you yourself subsequently seem to hint, an illusion? Is *liberal* Protestantism not a pseudo-Protestantism, whose real basis is not Protestantism, but rather a rational secularization? A small matter—top of 282, referring to note 18—compare Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, part 1, 5th paragraph.

My terrible handwriting must have brought about a terrible misunderstanding. How could you ever believe that I wrote that you will learn finally with clarity from my "Restatement" what the unstated premises of your work are? From this response you will merely see that I take the classical teaching on tyranny as in principle completely sufficient. The longer section, which comes to terms with Kojève's tract "La tyrannie et la sagesse," deals, admittedly, with general matters and will, I believe, make

69. Published by Voegelin as *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

70. Voegelin, "The Formation of the Marxian Revolutionary Idea," *Review of Politics* 12 (1950): 275–302.

71. The reference is to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," number eleven.

my premises clearer to you. They are very simple: *philosophari necesse est*, and philosophy is radically independent of faith—the root of *our* disagreement lies presumably in the second thesis.

I am *very* pleased that there is an opportunity to see you here in January. Here there reigns such atomization that I learned only from your letter that you are giving the Walgreen Lectures in the winter term.

With regard to the publication of the English original of my epilogue, now a new problem has arisen, insofar as the epilogue promises to run to forty printed pages. Gurian will probably not go along with it, and I must try to persuade Alvin Johnson that he too sometimes may also print a ruthless, reactionary utterance. I will keep you up to date.

With warm wishes

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 34

December 4, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

I have not yet responded to your friendly letter of August 25; and now your offprint on "Natural Right" has arrived.[72]

Let me at first thank you for the offprint. It really is an excellent analysis of historicism, with which I fully agree; and I am only eager to read what follows. I see that it is part of your Walgreen Lectures from last year—why has the book not yet appeared?[73] Or did it only pass me by? You suggest that in a further development you will provide a foundation for natural-law theory on the basis of classical political philosophy. And I would also like to know what the public in Chicago said of this effort; are there discussions after the lectures? And now to a point in your study that at the moment preoccupies me greatly. You say, on p. 425: "In the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to say at what point in the modern development

72. Strauss, "Natural Right and the Historical Approach," *Review of Politics* 12 (1950): 422–42.

73. Published by Strauss as *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953).

the decisive break occurred with the 'unhistorical' approach that prevailed in all earlier philosophy." I must grant you that our "present state of knowledge" is not the best, but I like to believe that one can say something about the origin of the movement of ideas that comes to a head in historicism. It seems to me, the origin lies in the gnosticism of the Middle Ages and the attempt to give a "meaning" to the immanent course of history, as for example in the works of Joachim of Flora. When the attempt is made, first merely in principle, to immanentize the transcendent *eschaton* (in the Christian sense of the term), then everything follows from the logic of the approach, right down to the historical fact as the answer to the meaning of self-interpreting existence. From the approach of the Middle Ages, the modern inclination seems to follow in seeing something else in history besides political, profane history. From this point of view, I would permit myself a correction to your formulation, that "*all* earlier philosophy" was unhistorical. Philosophy [deformed into] the system, from Descartes to Hegel, seems to me to form a unity, insofar as the idea of a philosophical, closed "system" dominates. However, the idea of "system," of the possible exhaustive penetration of the mystery of the cosmos and its existence by the intellect, is itself a Gnostic phenomenon, a drawing in of eternity into the time of the individual thinker. I would therefore restrict your comment on philosophy in the Platonic-Aristotelian sense (Aristotle, as far as I know, had no concept of system; the systematization of Aristotle comes from the commentators).—This brings me to a comment in your letter regarding the derivation of Marx from liberal Protestantism. You mean that liberal Protestantism already should no longer be spoken of as Protestantism, but instead be seen as a result of secularization. I would agree with that, insofar as secularization in the sense of a radical immanentization must be distinguished from the half-baked immanentization of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. If we follow the logic of the problem (that is, immanentization) to its beginning, then I would see in orthodox Protestantism already the start of immanentization. Calvin flirts with the problem in the *Institutes*, where his concern for the *certitudo salutis* through the unequivocal "call" is quite clearly a Gnostic attempt to gain certitude of salvation, which is a bit more certain than orthodox *cognitio fidei*. Luther vacillates, but his hatred of the *fides caritate formata*, his wild efforts to take love out of faith, and to make deliberate knowledge into its substance, seems to me to lead in the same direction. One would perhaps have to say that there was enough Catholic substance in "orthodox" Protestantism to

arrest a further development, the inner logic of which forces itself through in liberal Protestantism.

With regard to the "second thesis" of your letter, that philosophy is radically independent of faith, we will discuss that in Chicago. At the moment, I do not see how you get around the historical fact of the beginning of philosophy in the attitude of faith of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.

The reason for my rather long silence is my work on the Walgreen Lectures. Naturally, it became something else than I had first anticipated. The title will read "Truth and Representation"; and the problem of modern gnosticism will take up a large part of it.

Yours,
Eric Voegelin

Letter 35

10.12.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Just back from a trip to the east, I find your letter of the fourth of this month. I have just a bit of time, but unfortunately no proper paper. Excuse me.

My Walgreen Lectures have not yet appeared, because they are not yet ready to print. I have a bad conscience, but I would have even a worse one if I had already published them. The work remains a risk in either case, even though I do nothing more than present the *problem* of natural right as an unsolved problem. As to the reaction of the public here in Chicago, it was, I believe, favorable, especially among the younger ones, who at first see only an alternative between positivism-relativism-pragmatism and Neo-Thomism, and who can scarcely imagine that one can draw the consequence from one's ignorance that one must strive after knowledge, and that they see this immediately when one demonstrates it to them. There are *no* discussions after the Walgreen Lectures.

To your objections to the passage on page 425 of my article, I would say that of course I know of the idea of tracing back the turn to history to Joachim of Flora and the like (alone in the last two years the books of

Taubes and Löwith appeared, who do just this)[74] but also that it does not persuade me. I will not raise the objection that one would have to return from Joachim to the Islamic Shi'ah,[75] which for its part has a connection with Plato's *Statesman*, and so the clear lines and the clarity of the context fade away. Even if the lines from Joachim to Hegel exist, they would not bring out the turn to the thoroughly "this-worldly" philosophy, that is, from the eternal to a this-worldly process: one has to bring out as well the turn within philosophy. In this one must above all, as I see it, assume that "*all* earlier philosophy" was "ahistorical." "Ahistorical" is not the same as "systematic." Classical philosophy was not "systematic," but at the same time it was "ahistorical." "System" means the derivation of the whole sum of realities out of the *prōton physei*—it presumes that we can begin with the *prōton physei*, that the thinker stands at the beginning. Classical philosophy understands itself as the uncompletable ascent from *proteron pros hēmas* to *proteron physei*. Expressed otherwise: the "system" requires that the *hylē* be resolved into intelligible relations or the like, which classical philosophy denies. Classical philosophy is "ahistorical" insofar as it is a search for the *aie ōn*, within which all history has taken or can take place, for the *aie ōn* in no way opens up through "history": history is for classical philosophy infinitely unimportant, insofar as the decisive questions, the fundamental questions, necessarily relate to the *aie ōn*. The fundamental questions—(1) the question of the *archē* or the *archai*, (2) the question of the right life or the *aristē politeia*. "History" in the strict sense belongs in the practical dimension, in the dimension that is subordinated to the theoretical. Historicizing means the forgetting of eternity. This forgetting must be understood in terms of the rejection of the classical concept of philosophy. "*En brûlant les étapes*,"[76] one could say that historicism is a reaction to a system-philosophy, a reaction that has not freed itself from the ultimate presuppositions of system-philosophy—the obscuring of the radical difference between theory and praxis that lies at the basis of both forms of modern thinking. I say that historicism is a reaction to system-philosophy: the

74. Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Bern: Franke, 1947), and Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

75. Shi'ah is the smaller of the two major branches of Islam, as distinct from Sunnah. It began as an essentially political movement in early Islam but subsequently became a religious movement. Shi'is and Sunnis disagree chiefly on readings of the Qur'an and on the character of the imamate, the Shi'i religious leadership.

76. *Brûler une étape* means to pass by a halting-place without stopping; thus, Strauss proceeded directly to the "bottom line" regarding historicism and system-philosophy.

proto-Hegelian system is at first not "historical," except in an embryonic manner, as I think I said provisionally in chapter 6 of my Hobbes book.[77]

As to my remark on Protestant liberalism, namely that it cannot be understood alone from the religious tradition, I think above all of the overwhelming influence that modern science (critique of the possibility, or rather recognizability, of the miracles; denial of the simple reality of heaven and hell and the like) has had on the *whole* of modern thinking. One should think also of the influence of the discoveries as early as the sixteenth century that belongs by its structure to the influence of modern science. (Do you know my works, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [1930] and *Philosophy and Law* [1935], in which I tried to set out this connection in a somewhat more open-minded manner than usual?) Everything that I would write in response to your question would only be a misleading abbreviation of these explanations. Unfortunately, I do not have any copies of this book any more.

As to your question, "Philosophy and Faith," I deny that the "historical fact of the beginning of philosophy consists in the attitude of faith of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides," which you assume. Whatever *noein* might mean, it is certainly not *pistis* in some sense. On this point Heidegger in his *Holzwege* (who otherwise says many *adunatotata*) is simply right.

I am greatly looking forward to our reunion in January. We will not be in "agreement"—but for me it is always a great benefit and a rare joy to speak to a man who chooses the hard way.

With warm wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

PS. Renewed apologies for the paper on which I have written today.

77. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1936] 1952).

Letter 36

February 21, 1951

Dear Mr. Strauss,

We have just begun our semester, but now the first assault has somewhat died down; and I hurry to thank you and your dear wife very warmly for your hospitality.

In particular I wish to thank you for the opportunity to read your *Philosophy and Law*. After reading it, your present position is actually more difficult for me to understand than before. I have the impression that you have retreated from an understanding of the prophetic (religious) foundation of philosophizing (with which I would heartily agree) to a theory of *epistēmē*, and that you refuse to see the problem of *epistēmē* in connection with experience, out of which it emerges. Why you do this, I do not know. And how this position can work, when it comes to the treatment of a concrete problem (for example, to an interpretation of a Platonic myth), I cannot predict—for that I would first have to see from you a concrete implementation.

With all best wishes,

Very cordially yours,
Eric Voegelin

Letter 37

25.2.51

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I now have some time, but no proper paper. I fear when I do have the right paper, I will have no free time. So I dare to write to you on improper paper.

Warmest thanks for your letter. Your own thanks are quite unnecessary: we are very sorry not to see you more often—but these horrid flus, to say nothing of the demands of teaching duties. I could not even attend all your lectures. Therefore I also hesitate to say more than that they were most interesting. There is, as you can imagine, one point where our paths separate. I do not even want to try to describe it more exactly before I have read your lectures more closely. I have the intention to discuss them in detail in print.

With regard to *Philosophy and Law*, I believe that I basically still stand on the same ground. I hope, of course, that I have deepened my learning in the last fifteen years and would therefore express many things differently.

When I insisted at that time that the law has primacy, that was—leaving aside objective reasons—conditioned by the fact that I spoke of the Middle Ages. But you too would not deny that there is an essential distinction between the thinking of the Middle Ages, based on revelation, and the thinking of classical antiquity, not based on revelation. There is a double reason not to obscure this essential difference in any way. First, it is in the interest of revelation, which is by no means merely natural knowledge. Secondly, for the sake of human knowledge, *epistēmē*. You yourself have said that science matters very much to you. For me, it matters a great deal to understand it as such. Its classics are the Greeks and not the Bible. The classics demonstrated that truly human life is a life dedicated to science, knowledge, and the search for it. Coming from the Bible the *hen anagkaion* is something completely different. No justifiable purpose is served by obscuring this contradiction, by the postulating of the *tertium* from there [i.e., from the classics and the Bible].[78] Every synthesis is actually an option either for Jerusalem or for Athens.

Well, you speak of the religious foundation of classical philosophy. I would not do so simply for the reason that there is no Greek word for "religion." One would have to speak of the gods or of God or of the divine, and one would have to elucidate what different things the philosophers understood by God. But it was probably not the same as what the people understood by it. One would have to elucidate further which *experiences* of the divine the philosophers recognized as genuine. Plato and Aristotle attained, after all, *proof* of the existence of gods not from experience and customs but rather from the analysis of motion.

I believe still today that the *theioi nomoi* is the common ground of the Bible and philosophy—humanly speaking. But I would specify that, in any event, it is the problem of the multitude of *theioi nomoi* that leads to the diametrically opposed solutions of the Bible on the one hand and of philosophy on the other.

You seem to be quite sure that the Platonic myths are intelligible only on the basis of postulating a "religious" experience underlying them. I am not so sure about that. I confess my ignorance. It seems to me impossible really to solve the problem of the Platonic myth before one has solved the

78. Strauss's writing is very difficult to read in this passage.

problem of the Platonic dialogue, that is to say, the cosmos of the dialogues, since this whole work is a myth. Apart from that, those pieces that are usually designated as *the* myths of Plato are always elements of a dialogue. But as far as I know, so far nobody has been able to say clearly what the meaning of the dialogue is. That does not surprise me. Because without a complete understanding of the whole Platonic corpus, there remains inevitably a last doubt. I know of no one who could claim such an understanding. This much, I believe, emerges throughout from Plato, that he was less anxious to induce the better readers to believe than to induce them to think. And for that there is in fact no better means than the enigmatic quality of his work in general and the myths particularly.

I do not believe that the problem of the dialogues is irresolvable. It only seems to me that we are still quite far from doing so. Since when has the problem actually been noticed? Hardly before Schleiermacher, whose solution is demonstrably false. Then P. Friedländer began again—fundamentally [his interpretation was] only aesthetic. I find here and there good observations, but nowhere a clear exposition that goes to the bottom of things. Nearly the whole research is based on the hypothetical "development" theory, which cuts off all the central problems of interpretation by referring them to various periods of origin.

I do not know if you now understand my position better. Please do not hesitate to call me to account.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 38

April 22, 1951

Dear Mr. Strauss,

I must thank you for a whole number of things—for your letter of February 25, for the offprints on Hobbes and Max Weber,[79] and for the

79. Strauss, "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 4 (1950): 405–31, and "The Social Science of Max Weber," *Measure* 2 (1951): 204–30.

mimeographed article on Husik.[80] Thank you for everything and in particular for the Max Weber. It came just as I was working on the "Introduction" to the Walgreen Lectures; there I have also a few pages on Weber's value-free science and I see that to a considerable extent we agree in our analysis.

By mentioning the lectures I have also given you the reason why I left your letter lying for two months. My preoccupation with the Introduction left me no tranquility to "solve" either the problem of revelation or that of the Platonic dialogue, which you quite rightly identified in your letter as the cardinal points at which our views probably differ. You invite me very kindly to call you to account on these points. Surely that is not meant seriously. One can in such questions do nothing more than recognize the limitations of one's own knowledge and understanding. Let me in this sense, confess [my limitations] regarding the question of the relation between [human] knowledge and revelation.

The problem of revelation, to be at all discussable, must first of all be delimited. As "revelation," as "the word of God," one can first identify the contents of certain literary documents, which are canonized as "scriptures." By doing so, a historical problem of revelation is immediately raised, insofar as the canon was established by men (not by God) in lengthy and often very heated debate. At this point one could break off and push "revelation" to the side as the opinion of certain historical persons on the nature of these canonized literary works. If one remains at this point, then one would have to interpret (at least I see no other way) the phenomenon of faith in revelation psychologically (maybe even psychopathologically). Such a psychologization seems possible to me only under the condition that not only is the content of revelation psychologized, but also its presumed source, namely God, is denied. And that leads to metaphysical complications, which I need not go into any further.

If one allowed oneself to go beyond this point and enter into a discussion, then a number of consequences would follow. The people who fight over the inclusion or exclusion of works of literature in the canon are obviously in the possession of criteria for what is and what is not revelation. The problem of revelation seems thus to be inseparable from the problem of recognizing revelation as such; furthermore it seems

80. Strauss, "On Husik's Work in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *I. Husik's Philosophical Essays: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), i–xli.

inseparable as well from the problem of interpretation. Revealed truth exists only insofar as it is received by humans and is communicable.

The contrast between human knowledge and revealed knowledge can, therefore, not be set up without qualifications. All knowledge, including revealed knowledge, is human insofar as it is the knowledge of concrete men. But some knowledge is understood by the men to whom it befalls as stemming from a divine source. This formulation is not meant pseudopsychologically, because it does not dispute that the source is rightly diagnosed.

These formulations seem to be necessary so as to understand certain historical facts appropriately, as, for example, the problem of levels of clarity of the revelation, which is suggested by the Pauline series of nature, law, and spirit. Knowledge can be revealed knowledge even when it is not understood as such as, for example, "natural" law. Thereto belongs also Clement of Alexandria's conception that Greek philosophy is the "old testament" of the heathens, or the patristic theory of the *anima naturaliter Christiana*. And above all the factum of the *doctrina Christiana*, understood as a two-thousand-year development of revelation, belongs here. The "word" of God is not a word that can be pronounced, but is instead a meaning that can be articulated in a very "free" interpretation that legitimates itself from the presence of the spirit in the historical community.

Revelation, then, is humanly debatable because it, like all knowledge, is human knowledge. Revealed knowledge is, furthermore, not simply everything that anybody assumes was revealed to him; rather, its contents can be determined sociohistorically. It can be interpreted and rationally clarified by men following criteria (Clement's *Criteria of Interpretation*,[81] the Vincentine canon, Augustinian *sapientia*). It distinguishes itself from "mere" human knowledge in that the experience of the contents of revealed knowledge is of "being addressed" by God. And through this experience of "being addressed," the essential contents of revealed knowledge are given: (1) a man who understands himself in his "mere" humanness in contrast to a transcendental being; (2) a world-transcendent Being who is experienced as the highest reality in contrast to all worldly being; (3) a Being who "addresses," and therefore is a person, namely, God; (4) a man who can be addressed by this Being and who thereby stands in

81. Reference is probably to Clement of Alexandria, "The Criterion by Which Truth and Heresy Are Distinguished."

a relation of openness to Him. In this sense I would venture the formulation: the fact of revelation is its content.[82]

When revelation is understood in this sense, very interesting problems for the history of thought present themselves. Revelation in the Jewish and Christian sense seems possible only when man historically developed a consciousness of his humanness, which clearly separates him from transcendence. Such consciousness is, for example, not yet given in Homer's polytheism or with Hesiod. Divine and human are still interconnected. This fact is veiled, in my mind, through the unfortunate theory of "anthropomorphism" in polytheistic cultures. So far as the Greek gods are concerned there is no anthropomorphic representation of the divine, but rather a theomorphic symbolization of the contents of the human soul. The development of the soul (as Jaeger and Snell worked through very well in opposition to Rohde)[83] appears to me to be the process in which man dedivinized himself and realized the humanity of his spiritual life. Only with this spiritual concentration will it be possible to experience oneself as being addressed by a world-transcendent God. Revelation seems to me to have a peculiar historical "curve." In a polytheistic culture the gods "reveal" themselves frequently through appearances, signs, and addresses. With the differentiation and concentration of the soul this diffuse revelation disappears. In Plato, and even more clearly in Aristotle, the maximum closure of the soul seems to have been reached, in which the maximally concentrated soul comes to an understanding of transcendent Being, and orients itself "erotically" to such Being, but without finding a response. In Christianity the understanding of the soul reached by the Greeks appears to have been absorbed and enriched by the restoration of the reciprocal relationship with the divine Being, now known as revelation. (Decisively in contrast to the Aristotelian *philia*, which is excluded between God and man, is the Thomistic *amicitia* between God and man; interesting is again the exclusion of *amicitia* by Luther, and the reliance on *fides* as a one-sided act of truth in a historically past, and spiritually not present, revelation).

With respect to the relationship of science (and especially metaphysics)

82. See Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 78 and reference.

83. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, [1948] 1953); Erwin Rohde, *Psyche* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921).

and revelation, Augustine seems to me in principle to have shown the way. Revealed knowledge is, in the building of human knowledge, that knowledge of the pregivens of perception (*sapientia*, closely related to the Aristotelian *nous* as distinguished from *epistēmē*). To these pregivens belongs the experience of man of himself as *esse, nosse, velle,* the inseparable primal experience: I am as knowing and willing being; I know myself as being and willing; I will myself as a being and a knowing human. (For Augustine in the worldly sphere, the symbol of the trinity: the Father—Being; the Son—the recognizable order; the Spirit—the process of being in history). To these pregivens belongs further the being of God beyond time (in the just characterized dimensions of creation, order, and dynamic) and the human knowledge of this being through "revelation." Within this knowledge pregiven by *sapientia* stirs the philosophic *epistēmē*.

I must confess that these pregivens appear to me quite acceptable. The distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* removes from philosophizing a set of problems that in my opinion are not genuine problems of perception. Take for example a modern philosophical effort such as that of Husserl, who wishes to build up the world from stream of consciousness and from the noetics of the stream. And think of the tormenting constructions to which this project led in the construction of the "Thou" in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl could have saved himself much time and unnecessary work if he had acknowledged that the human being is not a consciousness, that neither the "I" nor the "Thou" can be "constituted" out of consciousness, that one cannot construct self-consciousness as the act of perception after the model of a sensuous perception, etc., that instead what is involved here is the pregivens of perception.

Or, to take a classical example, think of the complications to which one is led when one constructs the recognizable order "metaphysically" as the imposition of form on matter; one is then led, following a craftsman's model, to the mythical demiurge of the *Timaeus*. On the other hand, materialism and idealism disappear as philosophical problems when the order of being and its recognition belong to the pregivens. In this case, one deals with the order itself and with the methods and boundaries of its recognition.

Problems of the kind indicated appear to be philosophic misconstructions because the genuine problems of human knowledge are not separable from the area of the *sapientia*. Augustine classifies these as *fantastica fornicatio* perpetrated by the injection of human fantasies into the fields of knowledge, which are clarified by "revelation." (I would be prepared to

distinguish classical from Christian metaphysics, to accept to a considerable degree the position of Gilson, his *Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*). The philosophical worth of revelation appears to lie in the elimination of pseudoproblems.

And now to the second small problem—the Platonic dialogue. You are quite right when you say that nothing decent is available on the question and that the state of knowledge is rather unsatisfactory. That occurred to me too in my work on Plato, and I was puzzled because it appeared to me that the difficulty of understanding lay more in an *embarras de richesse* of motives than in the impossibility of finding them. Let me enumerate some of them:

1. Plato stands firmly under the influence of Aeschylus, particularly with regard to the problem of the *peithō*, the persuasive imposition of right order on the *daimonia* of desire. I would not understand *Prometheus*, for example, as Promethean in the romantic sense (as human revolt against a tyrannical fate), but instead as a drama of the soul, in which all persons represent forces of the soul, which struggle over the order of *Dike* in the soul—with the "solution" of a deliverance through the representative sufferings of Herakles hinted at the end. This drama of the soul is also the substance of the historical process (*Oresteia*) and the constitutional procedure (*Suppliants*). Aeschylus's sense of tragedy as a political cult seems to me to be (both individually and socially) the liturgy of political *Dike*. This cult loses its parenthetical meaning when the public is corrupt; the decisive symptom of corruption occurs when the representative of *Dike*, Socrates, is killed. The resolved tension of the Aeschylean tragedy becomes the unresolved tension of Socrates and Athens. There is now only one plot to tragedy, the tragedy of Socrates. Insofar as the Platonic dialogue is carried by the tension Socrates-Athens, it seems to be a continuation of Aeschylean tragedy under new historical-political circumstances.

2. But why tragedy at all, and why is it connected to the Platonic dialogue? The answer seems to me to lie in the Aeschylean and Platonic understanding of society as the order of the soul and the soul as the reflection of society. Apart from the explicit and basic principle, of the polis as man writ large, *Republic* VIII–IX seems to me to be important because of the splendid analysis of the decomposition of the soul—for example, of the oligarchs by the vices of society, which are perceived as forces of the soul; and at the end the magnificent analysis of tryanny as the social form of the

radically unsocial dream-fantasy of the tyrannical individual (here perhaps, as well, are Heraclitean overtones: the private worlds of the sleepwalkers). Insofar as the order of the soul is a properly functioning social conversation, the Platonic dialogue seems to be the required form of expression for the problem of the soul.

3. But for which public are these dialogues intended, when the decisive public, Athens, will not listen? Plato gives *one* answer to this question in the digression of the *Theaetetus*. Even the hardened pragmatist, who publicly will not listen to the philosophers, will become restless in private conversation, *in camera caritatis*. One can never know: the conversation must not stop. And the dialogue is no longer a political cult like the Aeschylean tragedy, but instead becomes an exoteric work of literature intended for every private person who may wish to listen.

4. But the conversation can only proceed when it is really a conversation. Decisive here are the scenes in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* where Socrates threatens to break off the conversation if the partner does not respond to the argument and instead gives "speeches." Under this perspective, the dialogue is the weapon for the restoration of public order, which had been privately disturbed by the pseudopublic instrument of rhetoric.

5. These weapons can, however, break down in the individual case. The opponent is hardened and does not allow himself to be moved by the dialogic *peithō*. Is the dialogue then, in the end, a meaningless undertaking? Plato's answer is the myth of the judgment of the dead in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic*. The dialogue continues, and the other-worldly leader of the dialogue is a judge who has healing and punishing sanctions at his disposal. One cannot escape the conversation. (This is not an explanation of all Platonic myths of judgment, but *only* the myths of the *Gorgias* and of the *Republic*.)

6. The relation between myth and dialogue is furthermore reversible. Not only is the myth the continuation of the dialogue, but the dialogue itself is a mythical tribunal. That is the idea of the *Apology*. In the *Apology* the action is played out at two levels. On the political level Socrates is judged by Athens; on the mythic level the tribunal of the gods (represented by Socrates) judges Athens. And the Socrates of the *Apology* does not leave his judges in doubt regarding the questions that they did not want to accept: in the future they would be posed as he posed them, to the people

of Athens. In this sense the dialogue is the continuation of the Socratic trial. The dialogue is a judicial proceeding.

7. When the conversation is carried on with success—in the Socratic-Platonic circle—then a further motive comes to light: the formation of the community through eros. This is the point that the members of the Stefan George Circle saw clearly. To see the image of the beautiful-good man (the *kalos k'agathos*) [or gentleman] in the other, to awaken it and draw it out (complicated by the mystery that the image in the other is one's own image), is possible only through the eroticism of conversation. For that one looks primarily to the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, again with their specific mythic extrapolations. In this context the famous problem of the living and the written word seems to belong. Plato could not say it more clearly (especially when you add the episode with Dionysius) than that what is involved in his philosophizing is not a "doctrine," but instead a dialogic awakening through the living word. (For the esoteric explanation of this awakening, it would be necessary to draw from the less-known *Theages*). When this process is extended over the community of the spoken word, then the literary form of the dialogue (particularly, the factually resultless dialogue) seems to be again appropriate.

8. A further problem seems to arise from the linkage of the dialogues, especially from the large trilogy *Republic-Timaeus-Critias*. In the *Republic* itself, the dialogue is used (a) as a tribunal over sophistic Athens and (mediated by the typical silencing of Thrasymachus) (b) as erotic conversation with the clear goal to lead to the *periagōgē* of the *Agathon*. This whole dialogue with the "young ones" is told by Socrates to the "old ones" (as it follows from the *Timaeus*). It is therefore a constituent of the conversation of the "old ones," which is continued by the *Timaeus* and *Critias*—and obviously intended to be that way by Plato from the time of the composition of the *Republic*. With that consideration emerges a new aspect of the myth. Added to the relation of the myth to judgment (*Republic, Gorgias*), the myth to the erotic community (*Symposium, Phaedrus,* and *Republic*), there is now the relation of the myth to primordial history. From the myth of Atlantis is derived the Socratic knowledge of order, from which is derived the authoritative worth of the conversation with the "young ones" in the *Republic*. The Socratic knowledge of order is, then, the ultimate implication of the mythical dialogue that extends through the spiritual history of the cosmos up to the gods.

9. The intimate relation between dialogue and myth reaches its high point, to my mind, in the *Laws*. Here the dialogue itself has become a myth. But that is a complicated story and can be shown only through detailed analysis. (If it interests you, my very extensive study on the *Laws* stands at your disposal.) Just to hint at the principle: the arrangement of the dialogue into episodes, just as the contents of the episodes, follows a cosmic analogy that, in the explanation of the institutions of the polis, becomes the contents of the dialogue.

10. To conclude: I would say that the problem of the Platonic myth and dialogue has a close connection to the question of revelation. Plato propounds no truth that had been revealed to him; he appears not to have had the experience of a prophetic address from God. Therefore no direct announcement. The myth of Plato seems to be an intermediate form—no longer the polytheistic myth that, because of the concentration of his soul, had become impossible; but it is not yet the free diagnosis of the divine source of the knowledge of order. God does not speak unmediated, but only as mediated through Socrates-Plato. Insofar as the place of God as the addresser is taken by Socrates-Plato, as the speaker in the dialogue, the fullest expression of "theomorphic" polytheism seems to be the final reason for the dialogue form; the divine and the human are not yet completely separated. (By the way, for this reason all the literary efforts of the Renaissance that attempt to imitate the form of the Platonic dialogue are condemned to failure.) Plato seems to have been aware of this problem of his divinity in the polytheistic sense. As evidence I would introduce the uncanny figures of gods in the *Laws* (puppet players and board-game players); and quite particularly the myth of the *Statesman*, where the post-Saturnic age, the cycle of Zeus, is understood as the cycle of the Platonic *basileus*.

This has become a long letter. But technically you provoked me with the complaint that the question why Plato wrote dialogues has not been clarified. It is certainly not that such a question cannot be clarified, if one really goes to it. I am curious what you say about this attempt.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 39

June 4, 1951

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Again I face the alternative to write on poor paper or not to write at all. I elect to do as usual. Excuse me!

Warmest thanks for your detailed and enlightening letter of April 22, which I can only now answer at the end of the semester. I congratulate you on the completion of the Walgreen Lectures, which I look forward with excitement to study. Only on the basis of these lectures will it be possible for me really to argue with you.

You mistake me when you believe that I did not seriously mean the request to take me to task. Without *logon dounai te kai dexasthai* [without giving or being given accounts] I, at least, cannot live.

You are completely right when you assume that a "psychologizing," that is to say, atheistic interpretation of revelation leads to confusion. It is sufficient to remember the example of Heidegger, whose interpretation of conscience ends in the "calling" being grasped as *Dasein* calling itself—here guilt, conscience, action, lose their meaning. One has to assume that something coming from God happens to man. But this happening is not *necessarily* to be understood as call or address; this is a *possible* interpretation; the acceptance of this interpretation, *therefore*, rests on faith and not knowledge. I go further: there is a fundamental difference between the call of God itself and the human formulation of this call; what we face historically is the latter (in case one does not accept verbal inspiration, which one can, but *need* not). *Either* the human formulation is radically problematic, and then one ends up in the desert of Kierkegaard's subjectivism, to which leads the thought that one may believe *only* God himself and no human intermediary—a subjectivism, out of which Kierkegaard can save himself only by making the *contents* of faith (the mystery of the Incarnation) *intelligible* in a way, as no one perhaps had attempted previously.

Or, the human formulation is *not* radically problematic—that is to say, there are *criteria* that permit a distinction *between* illegitimate (heretical) and legitimate formulations. If I understand you correctly, the latter is your view. On the basis of the same, you accept Christian dogma. I do not know, however, if you do this in the Catholic sense. In case you did this, we would easily come to an understanding. Because my distinction

between revelation and human knowledge to which you object is in harmony with the Catholic teaching. But I do not believe that you accept the Catholic teaching. Here a considerable difficulty could result, from your getting rid of the principle of tradition (in distinction from the principle of scripture), and Catholicism is most consistent in this respect.

It is with some reluctance that I as a non-Christian venture on this intra-Christian problem. But I can do so precisely because I can make it plain to myself that the problem, and the whole problem area, is, exactly, a Christian one and, through an appropriate extension, also a Jewish one; but then precisely it is not a "universal-human" one. That means that it presupposes a *specific* faith, which philosophy as philosophy does not and cannot do. Here and here alone it seems to me lies the divergence between us—also in the mere historical.[84]

I have no objections to your assertion that that which you designate as presupposition is, as you say, "acceptable." The only question is whether it is necessary.

To demonstrate this necessity, it is in no way sufficient to show the insufficiency of, for example, Husserl—all your objections to Husserl do not in any way affect Plato and Aristotle: because they were not "ideologues," there is no "problem of knowledge" for them. As to the ancients, they were *philosophoi* and knew therefore that there were difficulties with all human *sophia*: their understanding by no means fails if one or another of their attempted answers fails. The problems with which you occupied yourself will not become pseudoproblems because on the basis of faith, as distinct from knowledge, they may lose their seriousness; for knowledge, they keep their seriousness. I recall only what role within Christianity the problem of the immortality of the soul has played and *de jure* still plays. Certainly the demotion of the Platonic-Aristotelian problem area through Augustine, for example, was not bought at the price of his teaching on the cosmos, which was still meant to be historical, and which, humanly speaking, is no less fantastic than the teaching of the *Timaeus* you mentioned. Now, is there no problem in your quietly replacing this teaching on the cosmos with a modern view of history (ascent from polytheism to monotheism and the like)?

I read your exposition through again. You admit, of course, the distinction between a human knowledge inspired by revelation and "merely human" knowledge. It does not seem to me to contribute to greater clarity if one did not, in this distinction, recur to the tradition-sanctioned distinction between faith and knowledge.

84. See Letter 35.

I found your explanations with respect to the Platonic dialogue interesting and relevant in the highest degree. I can only allude to my reservations.

You say that the order of the soul is a properly functioning conversational community. I must assume you mean the *proper* order of the soul is a properly functioning conversational community. But the proper order of the soul corresponds to the proper order of the *polis*. Can one call the proper order of this *polis* (in Plato's *Laws*) a *conversation*? Here exists domination by command and legend, but precisely no conversation, which as such is based on the fiction or the reality of *equality*. In the Platonic sense, there is no Socratic dialogue. You yourself say that the dialogue is a means of combat for the restoration of public order: once it is restored the means of combat loses its sense. So: does the dialogue belong to the improper "order" or to the "unhealthy" soul or society?

Expressed otherwise: you speak of tragedy and you are silent about comedy, even though the dialogue just spoken about is a "synthesis" of tragedy and comedy. On the basis of known statements of Plato one might say that tragedy and *polis* belong together—correspondingly comedy and doubt about the *polis* belong together. From the standpoint of the philosophers the decay of the *polis* is not simply the worst thing. The whole *polis*, which believes in its eternity, has the inclination to hide the truly eternal, the *ontōs ōn*.

The Platonic dialogue cannot simply be understood from within the *polis* but rather only by philosophy. From this would follow that one cannot speak of "*the* conversation": it all depends with *whom* Socrates is speaking. The philosopher is in fact essentially speaking and not "doing"—in *this* sense the conversation may never stop. But the conversation that is not ultimately oriented toward philosophy is no conversation.

You are quite right: [Stefan] George understood more of Plato than did Wilamowitz, Jaeger, and the whole gang. But was that not a consequence of the fact that he did not think in biblical or secularized-biblical concepts? He is even right in doubting that there is a Platonic teaching in the sense that there is a Leibnizian teaching. But one should not go so far as to see the substance of the dialogues in an awakening to philosophic "existence," to a philosopher virtually without an object. Socrates knew that he knew nothing—this, if you will, is the Platonic teaching. But one cannot know *that* one does not know, if one does not [also] know what one does not know—that is to say, if one does not know what the actual questions and their rank of priority are. And Socrates knew that the *hen anagkaion* is *dêloun* or *skopein*. That, surely, is much less than a system, but also considerably more than the "maintenance of existence" and "divine faith."

Said in one sentence—I believe that philosophy in the Platonic sense is possible and necessary—you believe that philosophy understood in this sense was made obsolete by revelation. God knows who is right. But: insofar as it concerns the interpretation of *Plato*, it appears one must, before criticizing Plato, understand Plato in the sense in which *he* wanted [to be understood]. And this was, from the first and to the last, philosophy. Only here can the key to the dialogue be found.

Naturally, I do not say that someone who thinks in biblical concepts cannot understand Plato. I only say that one cannot understand Plato, if, in the undertaking of Platonic studies, one thinks in biblical concepts. In this sense the biblical question is to be separated from the philosophic one.

It pleases me to see that you think better of the "Thrasymachus"[85] than *hoi polloi*. I see no reason to judge this masterwork to be spurious.

The silence of Thrasymachus, I believe, is meant more comically than you take it. Do not forget that he comes back later two more times.

I would gladly read your interpretation of the *Laws*. But unfortunately I must wade through my Walgreen Lectures. They are already more than overdue and no end in sight.

Hoping to hear from you soon. With cordial greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 40

August 5, 1952

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for what you sent. The first two chapters of your *Persecution* bring the problem out superbly,[86] the problem that I believe I have observed has preoccupied you for many years. The confrontation of a series of old and new judgments on various philosophers and periods in the history of ideas is very instructive. And in any case the book will fulfill the need of showing the "young" what they must watch for.

85. *Republic*, book 1.

86. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952).

Thanks too for the study on Collingwood.[87] It comes quite conveniently. I am just working on a study of the "Oxford Political Philosophers"[88]—a command performance for the St. Andrew's *Philosophical Quarterly*—a reference to your article will substitute for the planned critique that is similar to your own.

Attached, a German article—the first written since 1938.[89]

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 41

April 20, 1953

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your offprints of "Walker's Machiavelli" and "Locke's Doctrine of Natural Right."[90]

Walker's translation of the *Discourses* does not in fact appear to be an outstanding achievement: The citations you give from the introduction are quite naive; and your technique, to contrast them with your careful individual references, is very skillful.

The Locke piece interested me greatly. (When will the *Natural Right* book finally come?) With regard to the general thesis—that Locke does not return to Hooker, but develops Hobbes further—I can on the basis of my own analyses heartily agree. The famous conflicts in Locke in fact do not exist. The *Second Treatise* does not base the theory of the right constitutional order upon some natural law but on a psychology of desire; and the way from this political psychology through Vauvenargues and Condillac to Helvétius seems clear to me.

Because I agree in total and in particular, I have a slight uneasiness in light of your handling of Locke as a representative of natural law—an uneasiness that will perhaps be dispersed when the obviously abbreviated parts are

87. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952): 559–86.

88. Voegelin, "The Oxford Political Philosophers," *Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1953): 97–114.

89. Voegelin, "Gnostische Politik," *Merkur* 4 (1952): 307–17.

90. Strauss, "Walker's Machiavelli," *Review of Metaphysics* 6 (1953): 437–46, and "On Locke's Doctrine of Natural Right," *Philosophical Review* 61 (1952): 475–502.

presented completely in print. The theory of natural right is, as you superbly demonstrate, camouflage for something quite different. But, I ask myself, can, in light of this situation, Locke still be treated as a philosopher of natural right? And even more: Is Locke still a philosopher at all?

I believe I have understood you properly to say that, in the case of Locke, you wish to enrich your observations about the concealment of the actually intended theory on the part of the philosopher behind harmless-looking formulas. But is this case not after all different from that in your excellent studies, for example, on Arabic philosophers? In the one case, which I would call the legitimate one, a philosopher tries to hide his philosophizing against disturbance by the unqualified; in the other, in the case of Locke, a nonphilosopher, a political ideologue, tries to hide his dirty tricks against the attentiveness of the qualified. Isn't that, which might appear as camouflage of a philosopher, the bad conscience of "modern" man, who doesn't quite dare to say outright what he intends to do, and thus therefore hides his nihilism, not only from others but also from himself, through the rich use of a conventional vocabulary.

That is obviously no argument against your excellent analysis. The question only arises whether historical understanding, the ordering in a historical context, still allows Locke's politics to be approached from the side of natural right, or whether the result of the analysis, the ideological buttressing of the political status quo, should be standing in the center as the essential point.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 42

April 15, 1953

Dear Mr. Strauss,[91]

Many thanks for your offprint of "Walker's Machiavelli" and "Locke's Doctrine of Natural Right."

Walker's translation of the *Discourses* does not in fact appear to be an outstanding achievement. The citations that you give from the "Introduc-

91. It is doubtful whether this letter was sent; it is housed in the Voegelin archive at the Hoover Institution. Letter 41, which it in part resembles closely, is in the Strauss collection at the University of Chicago Library.

tion" are quite naive; and your technique, to contrast with them your careful individual references, is very skillful.

The Locke piece interested me greatly. (When will the *Natural Right* book finally come?) With regard to the general thesis—that Locke does not return to Hooker, but develops Hobbes further—I can on the basis of my own analyses heartily agree. The famous conflicts in Locke in fact do not exist. The *Second Treatise* bases constitutional order on a psychology of desire; and the way from this political psychology through Vauvenargues and Condillac to Helvétius seems without doubt. The appearance of conflict arises through the conventional vocabulary of nature, reason, right, and law. Precisely in light of this agreement, however, I have a few questions of detail. They arise from a philological point, which disquiets me. On p. 479 you write:

> According to the traditional view, those sanctions are supplied by the judgment of God. Locke rejects this view. According to him, the judgment of the conscience is so far from being the judgment of God that the conscience "is nothing else but our opinion or judgment of the moral rectitude or depravity of our own actions."

My thoughts probably arise from ignorance—anyhow, which "traditional view" is here in opposition to Locke's? I consulted the index of my Regensburger edition of the *Summa Theologica* and found nine references to *conscientia*. C. is defined as *actus synderesis, spiritus corrector, paedagogus animae, dictamen rationis*—everything but "judgment of God." Gilson, in *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, with ample footnotes, also has only the act of scrutinizing our actions in the light of *ratio*. Locke's formula in the place quoted above could be by Thomas himself.

The difference in meaning at which you aim is obviously there. The question is only how does it arise in spite of the closest relationship of the linguistic formulas? In my opinion it rests on the changed meaning of the *ratio*. The Lockean *ratio* is in fact opinion, no longer participation in the *ratio divina*. With that, the question arises, essentially for the whole Age of Reason, whether a *ratio* that, unlike the classical and Christian, does not derive its authority from its share in divine being is still in any sense a *ratio*? For Locke, it is clear on the strength of your excellent study that it is no longer that. In the concrete realization he must drop the swindle of *ratio*, and in the last instance refer to desire.

The deliberate destruction of spiritual substance occurs throughout Locke's political work. In three places it becomes decisively visible. You

have dealt with two of them. The first act of destruction concerns *ratio*. The second, man as *imago Dei* (in your note, p. 380). From this second destruction, the specific Lockean idea of man as "proprietor of his own person" should follow, on which the theory of ownership through incorporation of work into natural matter is based. This definition of the essence of man as property of oneself always seemed to me to be one of the most terrible atrocities in the so-called history of philosophy—and one perhaps not yet sufficiently noticed. The third act of destruction comes in the *Letter on Toleration*, on the occasion of a *separation* from a church community. Locke asks himself if, on such an occasion, conflicts over property could ensue that would make necessary the intervention of the state. He answers in the negative for the following reasons: the sole question of property could emerge from contributions to provisions that are consumed during the sacrament of communion. The contributions are too trifling to lead to a suit under common law. This conception of communion as a consumption of staples that cost money always fascinated me as much as the conception of property of oneself. Beyond these three main points, I believe, the systematic destruction of symbols can be demonstrated as a continuous feature in Locke.

This destruction leads now inevitably to conflict between the language of symbol, which is still used, and the new meanings that are substituted. It is not a conflict in Locke's theory (there you are quite right; he is consistent) but instead in the verbal construction. In the *Second Treatise*, the conflict is expressed in the fact that Locke must try three times to establish finally a political order that he wishes to have as the right one. The three attempts are (1) the natural state of pioneer squatters with approximate economic equality ("in the beginning all the world was America"), (2) the same egalitarian state, protected by state organization, (3) the consent to inequality (through money) in the context of state organization. The ultimate stage will then be protected by the new definition of consent by the fact of residency and by the exclusion of a state-run social policy. This final protection could refer, in a concrete historical sense, to the attempts of the politics of the Stuarts (Stafford and Laud) to protect the farmers of N. England and the slaves in Bermuda against extreme exploitation by the landlords and merchants, the attempts that were the material motive for revolt of the upper classes against Charles I. It is a brutal ideological construction to support the position of the English upper class, to which Locke belonged through his social relations. The construction is consistent, insofar as the *concupiscentia* is maintained from the beginning as the driving motive; it is inconsistent, insofar as the

introduction of the vocabulary of natural right forces a repeated redefinition of the concept of nature.

And this leads, now, to the problem on which you have for so many years worked: the camouflage of the philosopher who wishes to protect the uncomfortable theories against conventional protests. If I understand you correctly, you see also in Locke such an effort at camouflage—and I believe you are right. But only then, when you considerably extend the problem of philosophic camouflage.

I mean the following: you follow a completely legitimate problem when you state that philosophers (I think for example about your Arabic studies) take precautionary measures to protect their philosophizing against disturbance by the unqualified. *But*: Is an ideological constructor, who brutally destroys every philosophical problem area in order to justify the political status quo, a philosopher? Is this not precisely the opposite case of a nihilistic destroyer, who wishes to cover his work of destruction from the attentiveness of the qualified? What difference, I ask myself, actually exists between Locke and that series of types that Camus deals with in *L'Homme révolté*? Isn't that which may still appear as camouflage of a philosopher already the bad conscience of "modern" man, who doesn't quite dare to declare the knavery that he actually intends; and so he hides it not only from others but also from himself, by the ample use of a conventional vocabulary? That possibility recalls the words of Karl Kraus; such a person knows already what he wants, only subconsciously. What is this political philosophy of Locke other than the roguery of which Anatole France in the *Île des Pengouins* makes fun: the majesty of the law that forbids equally the poor and the rich to steal. Finally, when one considers the development from Locke to Marx, what is this Lockean ideal picture of political order but the picture of bourgeois society that Marx believed he had to produce with laborious research and had to unmask. If England had not in fact been better than Locke, and had not again elevated itself through the Wesleyan Reformation, this nasty caricature of human order would have brought about some interesting revolutions.

Excuse the length of this letter. But when it comes to Locke, my heart runs over. He is for me one of the most repugnant, dirty, morally corrupt appearances in the history of humanity. But back to our technical problem: it seems questionable to me, at least where it concerns Locke's political work, whether it still falls within the area of philosophizing; and following from that, it seems questionable whether the substance of Locke's political work becomes accessible by attending to the question of philosophical camouflage. Perhaps what is involved is a phenomenon of a completely

different order; Locke was one of the first very great cases of spiritual pathology, whose adequate treatment would require a different conceptual apparatus.

Let me thank you again cordially,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 43

April 29, 1953

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Many thanks for your friendly lines. I am pleased that you agree with the central point of my presentation of Locke, which presumably will not meet all Anglo-Saxon wishes. I know that here in the Department of Philosophy the fundamental agreement between Locke and Aristotle is taught.

I believe that I do not go wrong when I designate Locke, as well as Hobbes, as natural-right theorists. In the previous chapter on Hobbes (in the *Revue de Philosophie*)[92] I pointed out the radical difference between modern and premodern natural right. Locke's teaching is modern natural right, which can be distinguished from utilitarianism and the like *only* by the recognition of natural right. I too take the modern natural right as untenable and narrow, or crude. But one must allow the fact that it is about natural right; otherwise one cannot understand the connection with Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. In other words: German idealism is a return to the premodern on an "English" and therefore insufficient basis. I cannot develop this further here. You will find a further, but by no means sufficient explanation, in my small book on natural right and history, which will appear in the fall and which will be sent to you immediately after its appearance. A further hint perhaps: the German idealistic concept of freedom is a synthesis of the premodern concept of virtue with the Hobbesian-Lockean concept of subjective right as the morally fundamental fact.

You did very well to recognize that I wanted to enrich my observations on the esoteric by my remarks concerning Locke. The reason for this is that there is a fundamental distinction between the technique of true philoso-

92. Strauss, "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 4 (1950): 405–31.

phy and that of modern philosophy. As to the last point, I believe that I explained the most urgent things in the essay "Persecution and the Art of Writing" (reprinted in the book under the same title).

Do you know, incidentally, Lawrence Thompson's *Quarrel with God*? It would be worth your interest.

I begin *lentissime* to write a small book on Machiavelli.[93] I can't help loving him—in spite of his errors.

Cordially yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 44

May 22, 1953

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your essay on the Oxford philosophers.[94] I do not need to say to you that I am on the main point completely in accord with you: the critique of nonphilosophy of "conscience," of the use of "rules of thumb" (or prudential devices, as you say) instead of authentic principles. Above all, it pleases me to see that you break even more decisively with historicism. "Externally," our efforts are to a surprising degree extensively in accord. I have doubts actually on only two points. The distinction (103, paragraph 3)[95] between principles and prudential measures, as you under-

93. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958).

94. Voegelin, "The Oxford Political Philosophers," *Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1953): 97–114.

95. On pages 103–4 Voegelin wrote:

> The anachronistic use of terms, while impairing the theoretical value of the judgment, has nevertheless an intelligible purpose. Mr. D'Entrèves assumes three types of political principles: the medieval totalitarian, the modern totalitarian, and in between the preferred modern type characterized by free pursuit of truth, religious freedom according to conscience, and civil liberties. If we make the suggested distinction between philosophical anthropology (as a science of principles) and prudential measures that will, under given historical circumstances, create the best possible environment for the attainment of the highest good, the question concerning the status of the aforementioned freedoms cannot be avoided. Are these freedoms really fundamental principles,

stand them, would make impossible the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of the *aristē politeia* as a model necessary for the best life.[96] Or do I misunderstand you? When you say on p. 109 that we have little use for Greek *poleis* at present,[97] the meaning of the *polis* as the perfect form of human community, as Plato and Aristotle declared, would also not seem to matter. With respect to p. 111, n. 15,[98] I am sure that Thomas More's

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or are they perhaps no more than prudential devices? If the latter should be the case, the halo that surrounds them certainly would pale; the rude question, which can never be addressed to a principle, would have to be asked: whether they work or whether they have failed, perhaps quite as miserably as the medieval device of persecution. If, however, the distinction is not made, embarrassment will be avoided and the freedoms can be as inalienable, eternal, and ultimate as anyone desires. The cult of political institutions as incarnations of principles depends on the suspension of theoretical animation.

96. Strauss's writing is particularly difficult to read here. See Voegelin's remark in the following letter.

97. On page 109 Voegelin wrote:

> Aristotle did not create 'ideal states' (the very word 'ideal' has no equivalent in Greek), but developed imaginative paradigms, models of the best polis. What is 'best' again has nothing to do with 'ideals', but will be decided by the pragmatic suitability of the model to provide an environment for the 'best' or 'happiest life'; and the criterion of the best or happiest life in its turn will be established by the science of philosophical anthropology. The best life, according to the various formulations, is the life which leads to the unfolding of the dianoetic excellences, to one's existence as philosopher, to the *bios theōrētikos*, or to the cultivation of the noetic self. The models, thus, are based on a theory of the nature of man, which claims to be a science. Nobody, of course, will today unreservedly agree with the results of the Platonic-Aristotelian analysis of human nature; for in order to agree he would have to ignore the advances of philosophical anthropology that we owe to the Fathers and Scholastics, as well as to such contemporary thinkers as Bergson, Gilson, Jaspers, Lubac, or Balthasar; and as far as the classical models are concerned, our pragmatic interest in them will be mild since we have little use for Greek *poleis* at present. Such restrictions, however, do not affect the principle established by the classic philosophers that a philosophy of politics must rest on a theory of the nature of man, and that philosophical anthropology is a science—not an occasion for idealistic tantrums.

98. On page 111, footnote 15, Voegelin wrote:

> I have included the passages on preventive warfare in the account because they indicate a strain in Collingwood that goes farther back than Hobbes. Preventive

concept of a civilizing war goes back to the classical tradition: here lies really no *innovatio*.

Cordially yours,

Leo Strauss

n. I pass over our perennial difference of opinion concerning gnosis.

Letter 45

June 10, 1953

Dear Mr. Strauss,

I must thank you for two letters—the one from March and that of May 22. Excuse the long delay. I was quite ill with several operations (an intestinal problem) and am only now recuperating. The pressure of work has been increased by the hospitalization.

What you write about Locke is very valuable—but I must wait for your study on natural right to see the problem in the context at which you hint (the German natural right).

A misfortune has occurred with regard to your letter of May 22: despite the most ardent paleographic efforts I could not decipher the decisive sentence in which you formulate your doubts about the distinction between principles and prudential devices in connection with Aristotle-Plato. (At best I can usually read your Greek.)—Fortunately, I could read your sentence about More. That is an interesting point. You are certainly right when you say that the classical tradition plays a role in More's idea of a war of cultures. But does it not have to do, after all, with an *innovatio*, insofar as the war of cultures in a pre-Christian culture has a completely different spiritual status than in a Christian (or maybe post-Christian)? Until 1900 China still had a foreign ministry with the title of an office to supervise the barbaric border peoples; but that is something different from the differentiation of civilizations of More or Vitoria, which signifies something like the secularization of the Crusades.

During the last weeks I greatly regretted that we have no opportunity to

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warfare against civilizationally inferior peoples was demanded and justified, for the first time in English political thought, by Thomas More in the *Utopia*. In the setting of the *Utopia* the origin of the argument in humanistic *hubris* is even clearer than in Collingwood's work.

speak occasionally. I am working on the Israelite chapter of my *History*—from the perspective that Israel articulated history as a symbolic form of the same order as the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmological myths, and Hellenic philosophy. It is quite delicate work, especially with regard to my absolutely insufficient knowledge of Hebrew.

We are driving to California in two days, to a summer school; we will be back at the end of July.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,
Eric Voegelin

Letter 46

University of California
Dept. of Political Science
Berkeley 4, California
June 23, 1953

Professor Eric Voegelin
741 Canal Street
Baton Rouge 2, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Voegelin:

Many thanks for your letter. You are not the first to complain about my handwriting. This explains why I dictate the present letter.

I was sorry to hear that you have been ill. I wish you a speedy and complete recovery.

I do not remember at the moment what I said about the distinction between principles and prudential devices in connection with Plato and Aristotle. I believe my objection had something to do with the fact that the distinction as understood by you did not make sufficient allowance for the classical concept of the best political or social order. I have dealt with this subject at some length in the fourth chapter of my forthcoming book on natural right. Maybe we can take up the discussion after you have had an opportunity to read that chapter. The book ought to be out sometime in September.

As regards the problem of history in the Old Testament, I regard this as one of the most complex problems in intellectual history. I think perhaps the utopian plan would be to devote about ten years to the solution of this problem.

As you can see from the letterhead, I am giving the summer course at Berkeley. I plan to be back in Chicago early in September.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Leo Strauss

Professor of Political Philosophy

LS:pv

Letter 47

June 3, 1956

Dear Mr. Strauss,

A few days ago I heard from Walter Berns[99] that you had a small heart attack but that you are already home from the hospital. And at the same time came the review of Riezler, addressed by you personally.[100] I hope from that, that it was nothing too serious. And now I just receive a letter from Stokes[101] [saying] that you had to decline your lecture in Buck Hills Falls and that you need, after all, a few months of complete convalescence.

I do not need to assure you how much your illness affected me. And in that is mixed a selfish concern, that I will again not see you. I had so looked forward to this opportunity of a longer conversation, and above all finally to see you in action.

We both wish you and your family best, and hope that you will soon be recovered.

Very warmly,

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

99. Walter Berns studied with Strauss and was a colleague of Voegelin at Louisiana State University.

100. Strauss, "Kurt Riezler, 1882–1955," *Social Research* 23 (1956): 3–34. Reprinted in *What Is Political Philosophy?* ch. 10.

101. Harold W. Stokes was dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, New York University, which sponsored the Buck Hills Falls conferences each year.

Letter 48

January 24, 1958

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Your Farabi study at last reached me here.[102] I see that you continue your inquiry into concealment through numerous methods. Every single one of these inquiries brings new fascinating material—like that of Farabi. Many thanks.

Tomorrow, I am leaving here. Mid-February I hope to be installed in Munich.[103] I hope we will see each other on occasion there.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 49

The Univ. of Chicago
Dept. of Political Science
1126 East 59th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois
11 February 1960

Professor Eric Voegelin
Munich 2
Theresienstr. 3–5/IV

Dear Mr. Voegelin:

This is only to thank you for sending me your statement on "Democracy in the New Europe."[104] I am very much impressed by the clarity, sobriety, and conscientiousness of the statement with which I entirely concur. I just wrote to Hallowell asking him to bring out your statement in an English

102. Strauss, "How Farabi Read Plato's *Laws*," in *Melanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus: Institut francais de Damas, 1957), 3:319–44.

103. In 1958, Voegelin removed to Munich to establish and direct the Geschwister-Scholl Institut der Universität München.

104. Voegelin, "Demokratie im neuen Europa," *Gesellschaft Staat-Erzeihung* 4 (1959): 293–300.

translation in his *Journal.*[105] I do not have to tell you why it would be very good if it were made accessible to the American political scientists.

I hope you are happy in Munich.

With kindest regards.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 50

February 15, 1960

Professor Leo Strauss
Dept. of Political Science
The University of Chicago
1126 East 59th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois

Dear Mr. Strauss:

Thanks for your note of February 11.

I am glad you liked my address to the academy.

Notre Dame University has invited me to be a visiting professor in the winter semester 1960/61, and I have accepted. That will give us some occasion to get together—a possibility to which I look forward very much.

With all good wishes, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Eric Voegelin

105. John Hallowell, professor of political science, Duke University, was editor of the *Journal of Politics* and edited Voegelin's *From Enlightenment to Revolution.*

Letter 51

The Univ. of Chicago
Dept. of Political Science
1126 East 59th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois
22 February 1960

Professor Eric Voegelin
Theresienstrasse 3–5/IV
Munich 2, West Germany

Dear Voegelin:

I congratulate you on your invitation to Notre Dame. I regret very much that I will not be in Chicago at that time but somewhere in California. I am genuinely sorry about the fact that we shall miss one another.

Cordially yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 52

Sept. 7, 1964
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Professor Leo Strauss
Dept. of Political Science
The University of Chicago
1126 East 59th St.
Chicago 37, Illinois
U.S.A.

Dear Strauss:

Toward the beginning of the last term I received from the publisher a copy of *City and Man*.[106]

Let me thank you very much for this gift. At least, I have come round to reading it with the greatest care and I must say that I admire your analysis greatly. You will not be surprised if I say that I was most impressed

106. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964).

by the chapter on Thucydides. The analysis of the literary form seems to be in this case most felicitous.

In the springtime, that is, beginning with Feb. 1, I shall again be at Notre Dame, and I hope very much that it will be possible to get together with you in Chicago in this period.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Eric Voegelin